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"I AM NO THIEF," SHE SAID; "THERE CAN BE NO HARM IN MY KNOWING HOW MY CHILDREN ARE TO FARE IN THE DISPOSAL OF WHAT SHOULD BE THEIRS BY RIGHT."

Jack's Snare;

OR,

THE KENT BOYS' PLOT.

BY MRS. ANN E. PORTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVENT.

WE were seated at breakfast. The carrier was late with the paper that morning—so late that father failed to enjoy his meal. The morning news had become a kind of necessary condiment with him to make his breakfast relish. "Something wrong, I dare say," he rather moodily muttered, "for the carrier is not likely to miss my door."

"Paper!" just then was echoed in the street, and my brother Willie, leaping from his place, quickly brought the daily journal, and, leaning back in his chair, father soon became oblivious to his rolls and coffee.

"Great God!" he cried, suddenly springing up, his face showing the wildest agitation, "Judge Webb is dead—murdered!"

We all became as persons paralyzed. Father read:

"We delay our paper this morning to give our readers a brief account of the terrible tragedy enacted in our usually quiet village. This morning our esteemed fellow-citizen, Judge Webb, was found dead in his bed. Not appearing at his usual early hour, the housekeeper proceeded to his room. The door was found closed. No answer coming to her knock and call, she entered to behold the lifeless form of the judge upon the bed, bathed in blood—"

I remember no more—only that the room began to reel—and awoke to find my parents bending over me. I had fainted, but soon recovered from the shock. Father and Willie both quickly left the room, and we were left alone—mother and I. Not a word was said regarding the tragedy, though it was not, for a moment, absent from our thoughts.

"I wish Lottie was here," I at length said. Lottie Cheever was a waiting-girl, whom my mother had taken out of compassion for the child's unhappy condition. A little family of four children were left orphans. An old aunt strove to keep them together, but it was a desperate struggle with want, and Lottie and her sister Minnie found places—Lottie in our own home. The eldest of the four children was a boy—Jack Cheever—old enough to have been a stay and support, having well learned his father's trade of shoemaking; but he was a bad boy, working but little at the bench, and leading a wild life—an eye-sore to the community and a disgrace to his family. Yet, with what tenderness the sisters clung to him. Jack was dear to them, despite his faults; and the aunt, with singular devotion, loved Jack, too, never denying him a share in her hard-earned store, nor uttering a word of reproach when others condemned him. He could not have been utterly bad to command such love.

"I do wish Lottie would come," I repeated, impatiently. Though a waiting-girl, she was very dear to me. Two years my elder, beautiful in

form and features, gentle and loving in disposition, and possessed of rare intelligence for one so sadly circumstanced in life, she had become to me more of a confidant and companion than a servant.

Once each month Lottie and Minnie spent a day and night at their own family circle, where their good Aunt Lucy received them with a motherly fondness. Jack usually was at home on these occasions, and though visits were a sad pleasure, the children all welcomed them as precious seasons of reunion. They all loved one another too dearly to let poverty cast a shadow over their trust.

"When will Lottie come?" I murmured, as the day waned—the second day of her absence, and yet brought no return of her bright face.

"She will be here, doubtless, before tea," my mother replied; but tea-time came, and still the truant did not come. Father and Willie dropped in then. How I felt relieved that some one had come to dissipate the nameless gloom that oppressed me! And yet I dreaded their coming, for would they not revive the story of the murder? They did revive it, for, to my mother's inquiring glance, father answered:

"I am sorry to say that all is true as reported, concerning the murder of poor Judge Webb; and am deeply pained to state that to Jack Cheever all the evidence so far adduced points, at least as an accomplice in the terrible crime."

And he proceeded to state what the facts were in Jack's case—that he was out the previous night, and one of his boots was found under the very window of the judge's chamber by which an entrance was gained to the room. Upon the evidence Jack had been arrested, and at that moment was in jail.

Poor Lottie! Here was a reason for her delay to return. In the hour of her affliction she preferred to be within her own now doubly-desolate home.

"Jack Cheever did not do it," said Willie. "I know Jack. He is wild, and up to all sorts of mischief, but he had no hand in a murder—that I know." He spoke with decision, and I thanked him from the depths of my heart for his confidence.

"Even suspicion is terrible," said my mother.

"The more need, then, has he for friends," added Willie.

I shall never forget the wretchedness of that night—how the long hours dragged their slow length along until midnight; and then, how, almost driven to madness by my indefinable dread, I crept out through the hall up to Willie's room in the attic tower, where he had a chamber which few were permitted to enter. It was a queer place, filled with all kinds of odd things—with a hammock and bearskin for a bed, boxes for chairs, a cocoanut-shell for a drinking-cup, and many other contrivances which he had learned of in "Robinson Crusoe" and the "Swiss Family Robinson." Upon the door I rapped. He, evidently, was as sleepless as I, for he heard my timid knock, and came and opened the door at once.

"Willie, dear, may I sleep here?" I asked, in scarcely audible tones.

"Of course, sissy;" and to his hammock he conducted me. With what a delicious sense of

security I straightened out in it, while he wrapped me up in the soft Indian blanket!

"A dear, good boy you are, Will, to give me your own bed. Where will you sleep?"

"Right here by the door, on my bearskin; so now sleep;" and forthwith I launched off in the land of repose, forgetting the wretched sense of sorrow and fear which made waking so unhappy.

With the morrow came Aunt Lucy and Lottie. I awoke late, to find Willie, his room all in order, awaiting my movements. His first words were: "Lottie has come; but, mind you, sis, not a word must you say about Jack. Make her forget her sorrow if you can. I'm going to stand by Jack—just mark that—and Jack'll come out all right—just mark that." With this he left the attic, and I saw him no more, until, passing out of the yard on my way to school, he joined me, as if to pilot me safely by the Webb house. How compassionate he was, and so wise, I then thought, to act so considerately.

I hurried down to find breakfast all over, but the kind, provident Lottie had kept mine warm, and she was awaiting my appearance.

"Ah, Lottie, you shall never go away again to stay," I said, as I clasped my arms around her neck. "This house is lonely when you are gone, and I am unhappy, and Will is uneasy."

Her face lit up with a sweet smile, and a faint blush overspread it. "I will not go again, Anna, to stay so long;" and then, her trouble coming back to her with the thought of home, the tears gathered in her eyes, and slowly trickled down over her cheeks.

I kissed them away, and, forgetting my promise to Will, to say nothing of the murder, added: "Willie says Jack is not guilty, and that he'll stand by him; and he'll do it, I know, Lottie, for your sake."

"Does he say Jack is not guilty?" she said, her face lighting up hopefully. "Dear, dear Will."

The words came with thrilling force from her lips. She clasped me in her arms, pressed a kiss to my lips, and hurried off to her own room.

Aunt Lucy, at father's request, stated all particulars regarding Jack's supposed share in or knowledge of the tragedy. The afflicted old lad's narration was repeated to me by Will, as we slowly took our way to my school-room. It was as follows:

Jack had been very circumspect in his conduct for some days. He knew that his sisters, Lottie and Minnie, were coming home on Wednesday, his birthday. They were to have a little feast at six o'clock, after his day's work was done. Auntie had knit him a nice warm scarf, and the little girls stockings and mittens; the turkey and plum-pudding were cooked, and my mother sent mince pies and cake. Jack also had been liberal in furnishing oranges and candy. They had eaten their dinner, and Aunt Lucy said she was just thinking she had not been so happy for years, as they sat round the fire telling stories, Jack sober, and with five dollars in his pocket, which he had earned by his work in the shop. "I thought," said the poor woman, "that perhaps brighter days were in store for us. The clock had struck nine, and Lottie and Minnie were sleepy, and I was proposing they

should go to bed, when some one knocked at the door; Jack went, and I did not see the person, though I heard a voice which I should know if I heard again. As he passed out, he said:

"You will be sure to be there?" "Yes," said Jack, and in a moment more he was seated at the fire again, playing with the children. I said: "What is it, Jack?" and he answered: "Only an errand to me," and went on with his play. The children did not get to bed till ten o'clock. Jack and I sat up till nearly twelve. I was finishing some shirts, which were to be ready by the next day. As I was covering the fire, I noticed Jack putting on his boots. "I hope you are not going out," I said, "again to-night."

"Yes," said he, "I must go to Federal street, but I sha'n't stay there more than five minutes."

"But it is a long walk there—two miles, you know."

"Yes," said he, "but I'll be back in time to have some sleep, and breakfast with the children."

"I felt troubled, but it is of no use to remonstrate with Jack—he's set in his way—so I covered the fire and went to bed, but my last prayer was for Jack, that he might be kept from sin. I heard him come in between three and four in the morning, and when I went to call him at seven o'clock, he said, pleasantly: 'I'll be down in a moment,' and he came, perfectly sober and bright, as he always is, when he hadn't drank liquor at night. I noticed a pair of new shoes on the hearth, and Jack said, as he put them on: 'I lost my boot last night, and had to stop at the shop on my way home and get these shoes.' He was very chatty and pleasant with the girls, and told Lottie he would walk home with her when the day's work was over. Our breakfast was late, and he was just saying that he should be behind time at his work, when Mrs. Long, our next neighbor, came in, greatly excited, saying that Judge Webb was found murdered in his bed."

"I never saw such a look of surprise and horror on any one's face as I saw on Jack's at that moment; then it came upon me like a flash of lightning that he had said the night before, 'I am going to Federal street!' I was deathly sick and faint, but I tried to keep up till Mrs. Long went away, but I think she must have noticed Jack's looks. When she left, he rose and went out into the back kitchen; I followed. Great beads of sweat were standing on his face, and he was much agitated. 'Jack,' said I, laying my hand on his shoulder and speaking, but in such a hoarse voice, that the sound of it frightened me, 'Jack, are you guilty?' He turned and looked me full in the face—'So help me God, I am innocent, but it will be hard to prove it!' He would say no more, but went upstairs to his room, and threw himself on the bed. The girls couldn't help seeing that something was wrong, but I told them to help me about my work, and kept them so busy that I hoped they would not miss Jack. But before ten o'clock the sheriff came to the house, and demanded to see him."

"He was still in his room when the sheriff came. He did not resist when they took him, but said, 'I am not guilty.' 'Pretty strong evidence, my boy,' said the officer. 'I called at the

shop and found the mate of the boot which you left under the old man's window.' Jack said no more, but submitted to be handcuffed and led away.

"The poor girls were crying, and would not be comforted. I read a chapter in the Bible and prayed with him, and told them what I firmly believed, that he is innocent." She then asked my mother to excuse her for keeping Lottie, and went back to her poor, sad home.

"Willie, ain't you afraid that it will turn out that Jack is guilty?"

"I don't believe he is guilty of the murder at all. I wish I was a great man and a lawyer; I wouldn't rest till I had ferreted out the real murderer—there, now, run on—I can't go any further." I cast one glance at the great, gloomy house, a little distance on my right, and ran to the school-room.

CHAPTER II.

THREE PORTRAITS.

My teacher's name was Helen Ross. I loved her very much and thought her beautiful. I was not tardy that morning, as I feared, but the clock struck nine just as I entered the school-room.

She smiled and said, "I am glad, Anna; for you have had no tardy mark this year, and I hope you will not come so near it again." I told her I would try, and we were immediately requested to take our Bibles for the morning's lesson.

It was the 139th psalm, and when we read of the omnipresence of God—if I say—"Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day."

There was a pause, and even our teacher's voice trembled, as she answered: "Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and the light to thee are both alike."

Helen Ross was at this time about twenty years of age, rather above than under medium size, fair complexion, soft brown hair that rippled on her forehead (which was not low, according to the Grecian standard), without any artificial means. Her eyes were hazel, rather large and very gentle in expression. Her hands were beautifully shaped; but, what I most admired in my teacher, was the graceful curve of the neck. I sat on one side of her, and used to try sometimes to sketch her head and bust. The morning to which I refer she was dressed in a claret-colored merino with narrow ruffles around the throat and wrists; that upon the neck was fastened by a cameo broach, the device, an exquisitely cut head of Sappho. The hair, which was very abundant and wavy, was neither frizzled nor curled, but parted smoothly in front, and twined in heavy braids upon the back of her head, the only fastening an ivory arrow.

This was her usual school costume in winter.

She was the only child of a widowed mother, and they lived together in a neat little house on Federal street, giving up the largest room to the school, which was composed of about twenty girls from the ages of ten to fifteen, daughters of gentlemen who had confidence in Miss Helen, and who intended to keep their children with

her until they sent them to a finishing-school in the city. They therefore paid well, and made it remunerative to the teacher, who performed her duty faithfully.

Living, as we all did; in the vicinity of Judge Webb's house, it was not strange that the excitement was great in the school this week, and the recess occupied in discussing the murder and all its details.

"They've caught the murderer, and he's safe in jail," said one.

"Yes, and never will come out again till he rides to the gallows," said another.

"What does your father say about it?" said one of the girls to Mary Cushing, the daughter of a most prominent lawyer.

"I haven't heard him express an opinion," said the cautious daughter of a wise father.

"I wonder who Jack Cheever will get to defend him," said Alice Cutts, our eldest pupil, and who was considered the best in English studies. "He is poor and can't pay, and your father," turning to Miss Cushing, "has great prices when he undertakes a case. I heard he charged Judge Webb five thousand dollars in the last law-suit he managed for him."

The hot blood mounted to the face of Mary, and for once she was thrown off her guard.

"I heard him tell my mother this morning, when he was reading the paper, that he would like to defend Jack Cheever," and then, as soon as she had said it, walked away in great confusion, ashamed of her indiscretion. But what she had said emboldened me, and I ventured to say:

"I don't believe Jack is guilty."

At these words they all laughed, and Isabella Hall said:

"You ignorant little pussy. That's because you don't hear anything about it."

But little Mary Bird drew up to my side and whispered:

"I think so too. I know Jack and his sisters, and I think he was trying to be good lately. My mother says she hopes it will come out on the trial that he is innocent."

"Aren't you sorry," said Martha Green, "that you took Lottie Cheever into your family? Sha'n't you send her away now?"

I was too surprised and indignant to answer for a moment, but little Mary Bird spoke up quickly:

"Why should she send poor Lottie away? Where would she go?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the careless reply, "only one doesn't like to have anything to do with a murderer's family," and she walked to the gate. The girls followed her. Judge Webb's house could be seen from there. It was a large, gloomy brick house, isolated from the rest of the street, which was somewhat densely built, by a large yard. The house stood in the center of this space; the windows of the lower floor were guarded by heavy wooden shutters, so common in Philadelphia, but rare in the New England States. An iron fence ran the whole length of the yard in front, and this, added to the evergreens, of which there was an undue proportion in the lawn, gave a gloomy air to the whole place.

Judge Webb had been, in his younger days, a

sea-captain, engaged in the India trade, and thus laid the foundation of his immense fortune. He was a great economist, and considered by most who knew him to be very penurious; but though never giving to the needy at home, or in small sums, he now and then "came down handsomely," as the business men expressed it, on great occasions.

His first wife was a sister of Helen Ross's mother, a poor sewing-girl, remarkable for her beauty and modesty. She died young, at the birth of her first child; the infant lived but a few hours, and was laid by his mother's side in the coffin. His second wife was a minister's widow—a Mrs. March, with one son—Robert March.

Robert was, at the time my story commenced, a student in Squire Cushing's office. He was not a brilliant young man, but a thorough, patient scholar, retiring in his manners, and highly esteemed by all who knew him well. He was a mere schoolboy when his mother married Judge Webb. The old gentleman gave her to understand at the time of the marriage that Robert must have no expectations from him on account of their connection. Robert understood well that his connection with the judge would be of no pecuniary advantage, and he was satisfied that it should be so.

The day that he was twenty-one years of age, he commenced boarding with Mrs. Ross, who added to her little income by taking two or three boarders. He slept in the office, Squire Cushing willingly giving him the use of a small room for the sake of having some one there at night. When the young man concluded this arrangement, he said to the judge one day after dinner, as the old gentleman sat in his easy-chair by the fire: "I have made my arrangements to leave your house, sir, according to your wishes. I shall board with Mrs. Ross, very near here, and if you or my mother need me at any time, I shall be on hand. I sleep at the office."

"What? What's that you are saying, Robert?" said the old man, roused suddenly from his reverie over the coals of the wood-fire before him.

Robert repeated his remark.

"Well, well, I believe I did say that at the time of the marriage, years ago; but, I had forgotten it, and was not aware that you ever knew it. You have been a good boy, Robert, and have not given me any trouble. Let me see, Robert—have you ever asked me for money?"

A blush was on the face of Robert as he replied quickly: "Never, sir." But there was a little bitterness in his heart as he remembered how often he had needed money in that rich man's house—the nights he had spent in copying for his employer, or correcting proof for the publisher, that he might have decent clothes to wear. He thought, too, of the winter when he attended law-lectures in Cambridge; how much he suffered from cold for want of an overcoat, till, finally, his mother made one for him out of an old *roquelaur* which the judge had cast away, but so poor that she had difficulty in piecing it out.

Mrs. Webb would gladly have turned her camel's-hair shawl, which her husband brought home to her one day, or the nice sables which

he ordered from De Ford's, into a suit of clothes or a nice overcoat for Robert; but that was not in her power. When he was younger, she one day found him sweeping the stables of their neighbor, Mr. Porter, who paid him fifty cents for the job—a most liberal reward, Robert thought.

"You see, mother, the boys have treated me so often that I am ashamed to let them do it any more; and, as to-morrow will be the Fourth of July, I am going to spend this money in lemonade for Jim Kent and Cullen Parker."

The mother went into her kitchen. She had been making butter with her own hands, for there were two fine cows in the judge's stable. There were three rolls of butter, sweet and golden, more than they could use, but which must not be given away. She packed them nicely, and calling Robert to the pantry, said:

"Here, my son, can you sell this butter? If so, you may have the avails."

Robert carried it, in the evening, two miles, to the lower part of Water street, where he thought he would not be known, and obtained a dollar.

He was a rich boy that night, and discharged all his debts of honor on the Fourth.

Robert remembered these things, when the judge said: "Did you ever ask me for money?"

Yes, and he recalled, too, that, on the morning of that very Fourth, Mrs. Kent, the judge's sister, called, and was in a room with her brother more than an hour. At school, the same day, Jim Kent showed Robert a five-dollar gold coin, which he said was his spending-money for the next day. "I say, Bob, ain't I lucky? Mother got this out of 'Old Hunks' for me, and five for Kit for our Fourth. Bob," he said, drawing near, and speaking in a confidential tone, "don't you wish you had some of the money in that iron box?"

"Yes," said Robert.

"Did you ever see the inside of it?" said Jim, coming closer.

"Yes," said Robert, "once when he sent me with some papers to the bank."

Jim opened his eyes wide. "What was in it?" he said, in a very low voice.

"Papers and money," said Robert; "papers on the right side and gold and silver on the left. I didn't take much notice, however, only I saw one paper sealed and tied, and 'WILL' written in large hand on the outside. That is what all gentlemen do who have safes, don't they—keep their wills and money in them?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Jim, walking away.

The old gentleman mused a moment after Robert had told him of his decision to leave, and the latter, thinking there was no more to be said, rose to go.

"Stop a moment," said the judge. "You are in Cushing's office, studying law?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long do you expect to study before you are admitted to practice?"

"One year, sir. I am following the squire's advice, not to hurry into practice, until my preparation is thorough."

"That's right—Cushing is at the head of the bar in this region—hard worker, but he does charge as if he thought every word of his mouth

or stroke of his pen were worth a pound. Robert March, you have no means of your own; how do you expect to support yourself the next year?"

Robert mentioned various little ways by which he intended to gain money, and added:

"I have no fear, sir; I am healthy and strong."

"Robert March," said the judge, "you have lived with me ten years. I do not remember that I have ever given you a dollar."

"I thank you for my board, sir."

"Bring me pen and paper, and place that inkstand on the table."

The young man obeyed.

"Robert March, I have noticed that for the ten years you have been with me, you have swept the paths in winter, run our errands, brought my shaving-water, and made yourself generally useful. Your board is paid for."

In the mean while the old gentleman wrote.

"Here is a check for one thousand dollars—one hundred dollars for each year you have dwelt here, Robert March. Not from me; I am a stingy 'Old Hunk,' as I heard my nephew, James Kent, say the other day; but I'll do him the justice to add that he didn't know that I heard him—not from me, I say, but from your mother. It is her privilege and right to aid her son at this time, Robert March. Your mother is a good woman; I respect and esteem her highly, and believe she has taught you to be industrious and frugal. You may continue to board with us if you wish; but, perhaps, your plan is best. Board with Mrs. Ross and sleep at the office, you say?"

Yes, sir."

"Very well, come and see us often."

Robert was so surprised that he could only stammer out his thanks. That the present should be made at all surprised him; that it should be given in his mother's name, overwhelmed him.

"You needn't thank me, Robert March; thank your mother. I must take my nap now. Good day, Robert," and he shook hands with him and they parted—Robert to go to his mother, whom he found in his own room, kneeling down by his trunk, which she had packed with her own hands, and over which she was shedding tears. But she shed tears from another motive when Robert told her what had taken place in the dining-room.

Their years of sacrifice were forgotten in the recognition of the old man's real kindness.

CHAPTER III.

THE WILL.

ROBERT MARCH had been a member of Mrs. Ross's family nearly a year when the dreadful tragedy occurred. During that time his mother had died, leaving two, at least, who mourned her loss and cherished her memory with a tender regret which would cease only with life. It might be that the grief of the judge was mingled with much selfishness, for he missed the thoughtfulness that anticipated all his wants, the gentleness that bore with his hardness of temper, and sweet piety that almost made him feel that his wife's goodness might gain him admission into heaven, for he was one of those

men who looked upon his wife as he did upon his house or his bank-stock, as a part of his property. Not a day had passed since Robert left Judge Webb's that he had not spent at least an hour in his old home. He went from his own dinner to the room where the judge usually smoked his after-dinner cigar, and the old man, who went out but little, always expected to hear all the news of State street through Robert. His mother never claimed a moment of this time, but, when her husband, who always retired at nine o'clock, was comfortable in bed, then Robert would run in from the office, and chat a half-hour with her. It was precious time to the fond mother, and a pleasant memory in after years to the son.

Two other gentlemen were also daily callers at the Webb Mansion—James and Kitto Kent, sons of Judge Webb's sister. She was the only surviving member, save the old gentleman, of a very large family, and considered by the whole town the heir to his estate should she survive him. The two sons were, of course, looked upon as young men with great expectations. The father, Jabez Kent, was one of those inefficient, incapable men, with no marked traits of character, always destined to meet with bad luck—always trying, but never successful—just the sort of man that Judge Webb could have no patience with. He furnished Jabez capital, at the time he married his sister, to open a ship-furnishing store on the Stevens wharf; but he soon failed in that business. Then he tried the sale of West India goods. The war of 1812 ruined that. Disheartened at last, he found himself landed in a bank as assistant cashier, which place he held, and would probably continue to hold as long as he could have breath and patience to go his daily round in that treadmill, at a salary of eight hundred dollars a year. He was not an ambitious man, and for himself cared little for wealth; but his wife was restless and aspiring, and had so often reminded him of his deficiencies that he really believed he was unworthy to be called her husband; and gradually acquired that patient, meek face and manner which distinguish the husbands of energetic business women, who take the management of affairs into their own hands.

When James and Kitto were nearly through the grammar-school, their mother consulted the judge as to a choice of employment for them.

"Jim, of course, will go to college, and—"

"Why, of course," growled the brother.

"I thought that would be your choice," said the sister.

"My choice is that they should learn some useful trade. If they can do that and go to college too, very well."

"But, brother, here is your wife's son just entering college."

"What is that to me? I don't send him there, nor does a dollar of my money go toward it. One thing, Sarah, I wish you fully to understand, your boys must not be brought up with the idea that they will inherit my property. They will have none of it, unless they learn some useful trade by which they can earn an honest living."

The poor mother was rather taken aback by

this blunt talk from her brother. There was only one drop of comfort in it. She was jealous of Robert March, and his position in the family; he had learned no trade, and could, therefore, not come into possession of any of her brother's property; such was her reasoning.

When she communicated the result of her visit, the boys were angry, and declared they would not learn a trade. "Old Hunks" might take his money with him when he died, for all they cared. The father approved the plan of the judge, and advised them to select a trade at once; it would please the old gentleman, and might secure them an independence. This advice had little influence over them; but, their mother used such arguments when their father was not present, that they both entered upon their labors the next week, Jim in a printing-office, and Kitto as a bookbinder, the mother suggesting these as most nearly allied to literary pursuits. James learned his trade in an incredibly short time, and entered college a year after Robert. But, as the latter was out a year, earning the means to proceed with his studies, they both graduated at the same time, though at different colleges.

James Kent was handsome and popular, with a fine figure, a graceful address, and the gift of conversation. He was much admired. He had black hair, a piercing black eye; was lithe, and quick in his movements. His teeth were white and regular, and when he smiled, they were seen so prominently, that the first thought of a stranger, on conversing with him, was—what fine teeth the fellow has!

James Kent and Helen Ross were near neighbors. They had been playmates in childhood and classmates in school.

Helen's beauty and sweet temper made many friends, but she had no more zealous admirer than James Kent; her fair Saxon type of beauty, the opposite of his own, was only more fitted to win his love, or, rather, excite his passion, and he vowed to himself, on his return from college, when he saw her maturing into a well-developed, graceful woman, that he would marry Helen, or, if not, that she should never be the bride of another. The way seemed made easy for him, for, though Helen was retiring and easy, yet she evidently desired no other attention than that which she received from James, and as she was one of those earnest, loving hearts that know no fickleness, it was supposed, by all her friends, that when James came into possession of his property, they would marry.

But, Mrs. Ross was a thoughtful, cautious mother. "No, James," she said, when he was one day pleading earnestly with her, "no engagement ring, no binding promise, till Helen is older and you have seen more of life." A few thought Mrs. Ross was fearful that James might, in some way, fail of his uncle's property; but not those who knew her best. She was more afraid of James with it than without it. She, who loved so tenderly the few connected with her by ties of blood, believed firmly that James and Kitto would be the principal heirs to the Webb estate, and she who had watched James with all a mother's deep anxiety for her daughter's happiness, was afraid of the test.

Mrs. Ross was poor; she had no expectations; but, she would far rather see her married to a poor man who would cherish her tenderly, than to one who felt that he conferred a favor by giving her wealth and position. I think the mother was conscious—though by no word or look did she betray that suspicion to any one—that there was another who loved her daughter with all the strength of a warm, manly heart.

Robert March was struggling to obtain his profession. Years of hard labor were before him; middle age would probably come before he could gain a competence; there was no one to aid him in the hard battle of life. He must fight it single-handed, and fall or win alone. He did not shrink from the contest; but, how often he thought: "If I could have her by my side."

The impression was not weakened by the familiar intercourse of daily life, but, neither by words, looks, or tones, did Robert March reveal his love. He knew James Kent well—his utter selfishness and want of principle; but, so deep and true was his attachment, that he would gladly have given his own life, rather than have seen Helen married to him. James, on the other hand, was not disturbed by any feeling of jealousy. So confident was he of his own power of pleasing, so sure of his position and of Robert's inferiority, that the thought that Helen might feel any interest in him, other than mere neighborly regard, never entered his heart.

He was right. Daily they sat at the same table, read the same books, took the gage of each other's mental caliber; and a calm, sisterly regard, gradually took root in Helen's heart. But, Robert came and went, and no other feeling was awakened; her pulse beat no quicker at the sound of his footstep, nor did her thoughts travel toward him in his absence. Hers was a calm, quiet, even life; she loved study, and Robert brought her books, selecting them himself, guiding, all unconsciously to the reader, her literary progress.

James called daily, and was her constant attendant at lectures, evening visits, or places of amusement, till he came to feel that such was his right; and, to tell the truth, Helen was not averse to his assumption of it. Her quick-sighted mother understood this, but, with a rare discretion, kept silence, fearing the future, but hoping and praying also.

We cannot trace this love from its germ to the full blossom, but Helen Ross loved James Kent with the devoted, unselfish love of a true woman's heart. Her heart thrilled at the sound of his voice, and the quick blood mantled her cheek at his approach; and yet, James was not sure of his conquest. He had promised not to speak of love or an engagement, and Helen's calm, quiet manner, so opposite to his own impulsive, passionate nature, deceived him. He wished her more demonstrative, and was impatient for the two years of probation to end.

We have spoken of James Kent's brother, Kitto. He was a peculiar boy—reserved, sulky, unmanageable by his parents and teachers, but wholly subservient to his brother James, who exercised on him an influence equal to that claimed by a mesmerist.

"I'll ask Jim," was such a common phrase

with him that it became a by-word among the boys.

While James was in college, Kitto was plodding at the book-bindery, perfectly satisfied with his position, and apparently without ambition to rise. The one prominent trait in his character understood by all the school-boys, and by which only they could influence him, was avarice. "Stingy as Old Hunks," was the school-boy phrase. In his trade he manifested this, trying all the methods in his power to get money, and, once obtained, of secreting it. The bindery was connected with a bookstore, where he often acted as salesman. He found quite a sale among the boys for books of adventure, voyages, etc., so he furnished himself with a supply, and made enormous profits upon his small capital.

James was the only person who could procure money from Kitto; it was given reluctantly to him, and with a kind of abject fear that made a terrible struggle with his avarice. James was seldom in funds—Kitto never out. James always was neatly and fashionably dressed—Kitto in the plainest and cheapest clothes. The latter was most like his uncle, and yet not so much of a favorite as the more extravagant James.

"Now, Kitto, go and see your uncle. It is strange that you will not do so, without my urging it."

The young man went reluctantly, and was confused and awkward when there—invariably injuring some piece of furniture, or bearing the mud on his boots into the parlor, or knocking down with his ungainly arms some choice ornament, till the judge wished he would never enter the house.

James Kent was in the law-office of Hubbard and Jones, a new firm that had come in with quite a flourish of trumpets, occupying a suite of offices, elegantly furnished, and which proved quite a contrast to the dingy apartments of Lawyer Cushing. They were quite a dashing firm, and many prophesied that they would get all the business of the county into their hands soon; which prophecy did not seem to trouble Lawyer Cushing, nor inspire him with jealousy, for he was even known to send clients there when crowded himself, and he never spoke disparagingly of them.

Mrs. Webb's death made a sad change in the old brick mansion. She died suddenly, to the community at least, but for herself, she had been waiting the change; for she had seen a hand they did not see, beckoning her to come, and a voice they did not hear calling her from beyond the river. One night, when the judge was sleeping, she sat with Robert by the fire in the old-fashioned drawing-room. There was a wood fire on the hearth, which had burned to a bed of glowing coals, giving, with the one wax candle which burned on the high mantle, a dim light, but leaving much of the heavy, antiquated furniture in deep shadow. Opposite the fire-place, rather high up on the wall, hung the portrait of the judge's first wife, Mrs. Ross's sister. It represented a young and beautiful woman, with her hair in natural curls, confined only by a band of pearls around the head. The dim fire-light was thrown upon this picture, bringing it out in relief from its somber sur-

roundings. Mrs. Webb sat on one side of the fire, looking at the coals; her knitting-work had dropped into her lap, and her thin hands lay folded over it. She wore a black, heavy satin dress, not of glossy texture, but heavy and soft. A plain lace cap shaded and softened the face which was pale and thin from a slow disease, patiently borne in silence; but in the soft, blue eye, and well-shaped mouth, there was neither discontent with the present nor fear of the future. Robert sat on the other side of the fire, but in such a position that when he raised his eyes they fell upon the picture, which he seemed to take much pleasure in contemplating. He held in his hand a roll of papers, and rose to go, still looking at the picture as if he could not withdraw his gaze. "How like to Helen?" he said, aloud.

The words roused his mother from her reverie over the coals.

"Sit down, my son, a moment. I have something to say to you."

There was something imperative in her manner. Robert obeyed, and the mother's eyes rested upon him so lovingly that there was a blessing in the very look, but with a yearning tenderness, as if she would ward off, if possible, some impending sorrow.

"Robert, you love Helen Ross?"

Robert started, and, had the light been stronger, the mother would have seen the quick color rush to the face of her son, and as quickly disappear, leaving it almost pallid.

"Mother! no human being has ever heard me confess it."

"I am glad, my son; but I speak truth; and when one of your race loves, the passion is strong as death itself. My son, I tremble for you; the feeling has none the less strength because you have not given it voice. The river is deep and broad, but the shallow brook dances merrily and noiselessly on. Can you conquer this feeling, subdue this love—tear it out, root and branch?"

"Mother!"

"Can you leave Norbury, and never return till Helen is the wife of James Kent, or till death, if need be for your peace?"

"Mother, James Kent will not make Helen happy!"

"She thinks otherwise," replied the mother.

An expression of pain passed over Robert's face. The mother did not perceive it with the eye, but she felt it in her heart; yet she was strong, for true love can probe deeply if necessary. "Better pain now than great sorrow in the future," she said within herself.

"Robert, the best of our sex do not always love worthily. I know James Kent, and yet, strange as it may appear, I would not tear the veil away even from Helen's eyes. I love her, and would gladly gather her in my arms and call her *daughter*, but it cannot be. Once, in a dream, I saw you and Helen, floating, as it were, in a radiant cloud, with such an expression of perfect happiness as made my mother's heart leap for joy; but the next instant my eyes fell upon a broad, deep river of blood, in which a human being was just sinking, and with outstretched hands imploring help; but you turned away from him, as if you scorned

the prayer of the dying wretch. I awoke, praying that such happiness might not be yours, if it must be obtained through the suffering of a lost soul, or the hardening of your heart."

"Mother, no eyes but yours have read my heart, nor shall they. I do love Helen Ross as I never can love another woman! There is something in my heart which bids me not despair. God helping me, I will win; but I can bide my time."

"God help you, my son, I say, but help you to bear disappointment. There lies between you and the object of your ambition that impassable gulf—a woman's love. Why should you wish to win? She may love unworthily, but if it prove so, there still is no hope for you."

The coals on the hearth were growing dim, and darker became the shadows in the dusky room; the features of the portrait were scarcely visible, and a deathly chill for an instant made Robert feel as if his heart had ceased its beating. A dim, undefinable dread of some impending evil seized upon him; but the next moment his strong will had bidden the phantom down, and he rose. Standing erect, he said:

"Mother, it is not James Kent that Helen loves; it is an ideal—no more the real man than any other creature of the fancy."

"That may be; but you forget what James Kent is. Sooner than see you the husband of Helen Ross, he would take your heart's blood. As you value your own happiness come not between them; cease to think of Helen; time will bring forgetfulness or resignation."

"Mother, let us speak of something else."

Mrs. Webb came and laid her hand on her son's shoulder. "Robert, I have no legacy but a mother's love to leave you. I would it were otherwise, for you have years of struggle before you; but such is God's will, and you may be stronger for your battle with life. I had hoped before this to pay the only debt which your father left—two hundred dollars to Squire Cushing. It has lain heavily on my mind, and I must die, I fear, without discharging it. But, if you ever are able to do so, let me entreat you to honor your father's memory by paying it."

"I paid it, mother, on the very day that I received the check from the judge, and here is the receipt," producing a paper from his pocket-book.

"God bless you, my son!" said the mother; "now I am at rest," and a smile so sweet rested upon her countenance that the beauty of her youth returned for a moment. Robert drew her arm within his own, and walked to the door of the hall. "You may go up-stairs with me, Robert, if you please, and let me lean upon you. I have a strange fluttering at the heart at times, and it troubles me now."

Gently as a nurse lifts an infant, Robert raised his mother and bore her up the broad staircase, to the door of her sleeping-room.

"Good-night, mother," and the strong, manly form bent to receive the kiss with which they usually parted.

"Good-night, my boy. God bless you! You have never given me one moment of heart-pain, and He who blesses those who honor their parents will bless you."

With a rapid step Robert walked to his office.

Even his mother's love and blessing did not soothe the restlessness of his heart. "She bade me think no more of Helen! Tell the flowers not to bloom when the soft air and sweet sunshine of spring is on them! Tell the river not to seek the ocean—the moon to give no light when the glorious sun shines upon her—tell me to *live* and *not* love Helen Ross!"

Robert walked to the office with rapid step and a heart full of bitterness. Why was James Kent to be so highly favored? Was it not enough that he was to inherit the wealth of his uncle, and must he—Robert—struggle with poverty, and be doomed to disappointment and a long solitary life?

He felt that his fate was hard, with no sympathy but his fond mother's, who was powerless to aid him, and who bade him not to *hope*.

As he paced back and forth, his eyes fell on the small law library, only a few standard works, which he had purchased for himself.

A thought occurred to him: "Let my profession be my consoler. Henceforth I devote myself to that," and he immediately took his pen and books, and worked vigorously till the clock struck two. As he rose to seek his bed, a sweet memory stole into his heart: he was a boy again, kneeling at his mother's knee, with her hand upon his head, as he repeated his evening prayer. So strong was the impression that he knelt, and, though he heard no voice, and saw no form, he felt distinctly the pressure of that soft hand, and when he fell asleep he dreamed of seeing her in all her youthful beauty, and she said, "Come to me, my son, for you have never given me one moment of heart-pain."

The next morning, as he was dressing, a messenger came to the office, bidding him come quickly, for *his mother was dead*. She had died of heart disease, the doctor said. She could not have struggled with the great destroyer, for she seemed to be only sleeping, with her hands folded on her breast, and a sweet smile upon her face; but the "fluttering heart" had ceased to beat.

And then Robert knew, in his own heart, the hour of her departure, for was it not her hand that rested upon his head at two o'clock that morning?

"Alone! Alone!" were the words that seemed to ring in Robert's ears, and sink into his heart, when the earth rattled on the coffin, and the words, "Dust to dust!" were repeated by the clergyman. "Alone! Alone!" as he passed the gloomy old brick house that had ceased to have any attraction for him. "Alone! Alone!" as he saw James Kent and Ellen Ross, strolling arm-in-arm through the Park at twilight.

It was only with his books that he found companionship. He remembered these days in after years, when the knowledge, accumulated in this time of sorrow, was like a mine of gold to him.

Mrs. Ross and Helen were at Mrs. Webb's funeral, and, at the particular request of Mrs. Kent, remained for a day or two. The judge was old and feeble; the shock of his wife's sudden death for a time unmanned him, and he appeared like a helpless child. He said little, and sat all day in his easy-chair by the fire, which, though it was warm weather, was made for him, and served in the evening to make the

large gloomy room more cheerful. He received a call from Squire Cushing every day after breakfast. This latter gentleman had charge of his business, and the confidence which the old gentleman reposed in his lawyer, was a pleasing contrast to his intercourse with all other business men of the town. Robert continued his calls after dinner as usual. It was the particular request of the judge, and he was much annoyed if anything occurred to prevent it.

One day, before the dinner-hour, Mrs. Ross requested Helen to take her sewing and sit in the room with him. He apparently took no notice of her for a long time, but sat, looking at the fire. She was at work upon some piece of embroidery and was a little startled by the question abruptly asked: "What is your name?"

A little confused, she answered, "Helen, sir."

"Your whole name I mean."

"Helen Wadsworth Ross, sir."

"Helen Wadsworth? I thought so. Will you stand up and let me see your hight?"

Helen obeyed, though somewhat surprised. "Very like, very like," he repeated two or three times; "a striking resemblance! Helen, can you wheel my chair round a little, so that I can see the portrait on the wall over the sofa? Are you strong enough?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It turns very easily."

He looked from the picture to Helen, and from Helen to the picture, till he had satisfied himself that the resemblance was very marked.

"Your father was Captain Ross, of the ship *Eagle*, bound for Calcutta, lost on the voyage; second mate, Jack Carter, afterward in my employ—the only one saved."

"Yes, sir," said Helen.

"You are not old enough to remember it?"

"I was an infant, sir."

"Yes, yes, you must have been. Your father left no property?"

"Very little, sir."

"How have you and your mother supported yourselves?"

The questions were bluntly but not unkindly asked, and every one who knew Judge Webb understood his peculiarity. Therefore Helen was more amused than indignant. She was also glad to see the old gentleman rousing a little from the gloomy mood of the last few days.

"We have taken a few boarders, sir, and I teach school."

"Very well, very well," said the old gentleman; "there is always work to be done for those who are willing to do it. Do you like teaching?"

"Yes, sir, though it wears on me, I find."

The judge again relapsed into reverie, and this time his eyes were fixed, not on the coals, but on the fair young girl who was busy with her work, little dreaming that her face had been like an angel guide, leading the old man back to the days of his youth, and that sweet, sunny spring-time, when he too gathered a few flowers—flowers that had long since withered and turned to dust. For a few minutes ships and stocks and bonds were banished from his mind, and a girlish figure, lovely to look upon, stood at his side, and the man of God spoke the solemn

words which bound him to her for life—he lived over, in his reverie, the happy hours of her short wedded life, and then his face darkened and his brow contracted, as he recalled the day when she lay still beautiful in death, with her babe by her side.

It was rare for the miserly, hard old man to recall such memories, and it came like a summer rain upon the dry, dusty heart.

He said no more to Helen, but he watched her, and took pleasure in having her near him.

The next day Mrs. Kent came to tell him that she had found a housekeeper who was all he could desire, Mrs. Loud, a capable, energetic woman, who was perfectly trustworthy.

"I had been thinking," said her brother, "of making a proposition to Mrs. Ross and her daughter to remain with me!"

Mrs. Kent was taken by surprise; but she was wary and shrewd; she did not mean that Mrs. Ross and Helen should remain, but opposition, she well knew, would only make her brother more decided in his plan.

"Indeed! I had not thought of that," she replied. "Have you talked with them upon the subject?"

"No; but you may do so to-day."

She reported in the evening that the patrons of the school were unwilling that Helen should resign her charge; they had purchased the house and given the rent to Mrs. Ross; it would be wrong to disturb a business arrangement so satisfactory on both sides.

Now, all this, be it understood, was represented as Mrs. Ross's view of the matter, while Mrs. Kent alone had assumed the part—Mrs. Ross remaining in ignorance of the transaction.

Thus it came to pass that Mrs. Loud was installed housekeeper at the Webb mansion. She was a tall, spare woman, with sharp, black eyes, that looked keen and bright behind the spectacles, a shrill voice, and a quick step. She was precise and orderly, and the judge found his meals served at the moment, the bed well aired, his house in perfect order, his orders faithfully obeyed, and no cause of complaint on his part; yet he missed, oh! so much, the gentle step, and voice, and quiet ways of Robert's mother. He asked sometimes for Helen Ross, but Mrs. Kent, who came in daily, told him that Helen's time was wholly occupied by her school.

Once, however, he commissioned Robert March to bring her. It was on Saturday, and he detained her till Monday—the young girl very willing to add a little sunshine, if she could, to the somber old house.

"Come again—come often," said the judge to Helen, as she came in on Monday morning with her straw bonnet tied with a broad, blue ribbon under her chin, and her nicely-fitting sack, with its rows of pearl buttons.

"Yes, sir, I will," and she shook hands with him.

He drew her down and kissed her cheek.

"So like! so like!" he murmured, and after she left, he sat long in thought.

After the death of his wife, he had said to Mr. Cushing:

"My own business is all settled; if I die suddenly, also, you will have little to do arranging my affairs."

Mrs. Kent was, therefore, surprised to learn from Mrs. Loud that the lawyer came soon after breakfast, and was closeted with the judge, and they were doing a deal of business.

"We are to have dinner at two o'clock, and the lawyer will remain," the housekeeper said.

There was a little gossip before dinner at Mrs. Kent's house, whither the housekeeper had gone on some trifling errand. The information brought Mrs. Kent over to preside at the table—and to make various errands into the room after dinner.

The lawyer was shrewd; he knew Mrs. Kent, and he read her motives; he knew very well, for his ear was keen, that the step lingered at the door, and that an ear was at the key-hole; so he managed affairs accordingly, and Mrs. Kent went away as wise as she came, save that she was sure, very sure, that her brother had made some change in his will. She came in late in the evening, when Mrs. Loud informed her that the judge went up to his bedroom an hour earlier than usual—that he sat a long time by his safe, looking over papers, and when he rung for her again, he was very tired, and she feared he would have a bad night.

"It is not safe for him to sleep alone, with his door locked," said Mrs. Kent. "It really must not be; I will speak to him about it to-morrow."

"It troubles me very much," said the housekeeper; "no one could get to him if he were taken suddenly ill."

"I think one of my boys should come and sleep here," Mrs. Kent replied; "but I suppose he will be very obstinate about the matter, for he has an aversion to any change. Having always locked the door, he will think he must do so now."

To her surprise, the next day, he agreed with her that, at his age, it was unsafe to be alone. Perhaps the death of his wife had alarmed him; but, as to having one of the boys come, it was all nonsense. In case of sickness they would be good for nothing, and he feared no robbery, for his money and plate were in the bank. His sleeping-room was opposite the housekeeper's, and there were no other rooms communicating with these, which both opened into a hall. There was a window at one end of the hall, and a door opposite; both door and window were securely fastened by key, lock, bolt, bar and shutter. A bell at the head of the judge's bed communicated with the housekeeper's room.

After this day the judge left his door unlocked, and Mrs. Kent said she felt much easier in her mind. But this ease was not destined to last. The housekeeper was called away by the death of a new connection, and Mrs. Kent assumed her duties for a day and a night.

That night the judge coughed for a while after retiring, and his sister brought him a mixture to drink. He was revived and fell into a sound sleep. Mrs. Kent sat a while, listening to the regular breathing of the sleeper; a stray beam of moonlight lay upon the carpet and touched the corner of the iron safe. The watcher's eyes rested upon it, and the thought "if I could look within," entered her heart; the "if" became "can I do it?" The key was in the pocket of the coat which hung over the chair on which

her hand then rested. She took it out slowly, and held it some minutes in her hand; the temptation became stronger, the way easier. The old man slept well; he was always a heavy sleeper; the heavy crimson curtains which draped the bedstead had been drawn aside. She dropped them carefully, and then sat still a moment longer.

"For my children's sake I will risk it," she said. "If they are to be disappointed, better know it in time."

Very quietly she crossed the floor; the thick carpet gave no echo to her tread. The key was in the lock, and she paused, not because of any difficulty in opening it, for the safe was old-fashioned and opened easily. It was considered merely a safe-guard in case of fire. She paused, not from fear of the sleeper, for his heavy breathing told her of his oblivion to all that was going on around him, but a sudden qualm of conscience seized her, and for an instant she was half-won over by her good angel to go no further. But the key turned almost noiselessly.

"I am no thief," she said; "there can be no harm in my knowing how my children are to fare in the disposal of what should be theirs by right."

The task was easy, for on the right hand side lay a package of papers, among which she soon found, "Last will and testament of—" etc.

She opened and read, sitting down on the carpet, with the dim night-lamp in one hand. Once she laid them beside her to put on her spectacles.

Slowly and noiselessly she read; the words made a great tumult in her heart, but she was forced to be outwardly quiet. She found that James and Kitto Kent, Robert March and Helen Wadsworth Ross shared equally her brother's fortune; to herself was left a life annuity.

There were so many restrictions and fetters thrown about her own sons that it seemed doubtful, almost, whether they could come into possession at all. It was evident that their uncle had little confidence in them. Her heart was full of bitterness, and she longed to touch the light to the document and see it consumed to ashes. But that would not be safe. She therefore replaced it and went back to her seat by the bed, after having drawn aside the curtains to their former place.

She looked at the sleeper and shook her fist over him. "You unnatural old curmudgeon, to have so little feeling for me and mine! I wish—"

But the wish was not expressed in words, for the sleeper turned and spoke: "Robert March, don't forget to tell Mr. Cushing to come to-morrow." Ah, he was only dreaming, but Mrs. Kent was terribly frightened, and, as soon as she could, escaped to her room, there to spend a sleepless night, full of vexation.

A day or two after this occurrence the old gentleman sat by his open safe. He looked troubled, took off his spectacles and wiped them, rubbed his forehead and looked perplexed. Then he counted the little piles of gold and silver. It was no great amount—not enough to tempt a robber to the difficult task of breaking into the old mansion, which was supposed to be locked, double-locked and bolted, from all night-intruders. He counted and compared with a little

memorandum in his pocket; it was all right. Still he was puzzled, rubbed his forehead again and muttered to himself: "I must be losing my memory." He then arranged his papers again, for he was a very exact man, and so methodical that it was a common saying in State street: "As precise as old Webb."

That day he sent for his lawyer, and, as the latter left the house, he walked through Federal street with his head down, as if in a brown study. When he came to the office, he found Robert March at the table, writing.

"Well, Robert, and what do you think troubles the judge to-day?"

"The high insurance on the bark Argo? It is of no use. I have tried, and the underwriters will take no less."

"No, no, not that; he has got it into his head that some one has been to his safe. A pile of papers, marked No. 1, was found in compartment No. 2, and one important paper loose upon the floor of the safe."

"That is a terrible affair to the old gentleman," said Robert; "it will weigh upon his mind for a week. Can it be his memory is failing? Of course he must expect it at his age."

"Yes," said the lawyer, "but we are the last to be conscious of our own infirmities." The lawyer said this, but the next moment he smiled, as if a pleasant thought had struck him. "Yes, yes. I'll fix it, I'll fix it—the judge is failing; who knows what may happen? Fast bind, fast find."

"Did you speak, sir?" said Robert.

"No—did I? Perhaps I was thinking aloud."

The next morning he was closeted with the judge, and the result of that call has some connection with the conclusion of my story.

CHAPTER IV.

TEE SQUIRE'S DEVIL.

ONE fine morning in April, Willie and myself were playing in the front yard. Lottie was sitting upon the front steps, sad enough now, looking on at our game. All at once she jumped up and disappeared within the door, while a voice from the street cried out:

"Helloa, there—wa'n't that Jack Cheever's sister?"

"Well, suppose it was?" sharply responded my brother.

"Oh, nothing. Only I thought what a pity it was such a chap should have so trim a sister."

"What do *you* mean by 'such a chap?'" and Willie's eyes fairly blazed with his anger.

Dick Loud was slow in answering, and stood rolling the tobacco in his mouth, eying Willie, as if he wished to read his thoughts.

"If half I hear is true, there's proof enough to hang him; but, ye see, I've been gone, and don't know much about it. I've been off-and-on for the last year, and was awfully taken aback, when I came in with my fishing-smack t'other day, to find my old friend Jack in the stone jug. It will go pretty hard with him—that old boot and his previous character."

"That old boot!" said Willie; "that's nothing but circumstantial evidence, and we must have something else to hang a man!"

"Helloa! my sprig of a lawyer; so you are

studying the law-books to defend your friend. Pretty company for a young gentleman of your standing!"

This roused Willie's temper, and he replied with some warmth:

"He's better than some others that I know, and don't deserve hanging half as much. The less *you* say the more the people will like it."

"You're rather sharp, my little man. I'd no wish to offend you this morning. I'll haul off; so good-by to ye," and he went off down the street.

Dick Loud was the son of Mrs. Loud, the housekeeper of Judge Webb. He had been a very bad boy and an ungrateful son, having spent all his mother's little property, and made her much heart-trouble also. He was with Jack Cheever a great deal of the time when he was on shore, and Lottie said that it was Dick that made her brother so bad, for, when he was gone, Jack behaved better.

"Dick, it seems, was not at home when the murder was committed," I suggested to Willie.

"Wasn't he?" said Willie.

"Why, didn't you hear what he said?"

"Yes; maybe he was at home, and maybe he was not," said Willie. "A fellow that will steal the last dollar from his mother will tell lies and do something worse."

This was good logic, and I did not dispute it.

"Lottie, I am going up to see your Aunt Lucy to-day. Any message to her?" asked Willie.

"Oh, yes, Willie; please take this to her," and she went to the pantry and produced from under a bowl, where she had hidden it, an apple and a piece of cake, both of which she had saved from her own plate at table; "and, Willie, do you think—could I, any way—" and as she spoke the tears came, and she choked so she couldn't finish the sentence.

"I know what you mean, Lottie—could you send something to Jack? I'll try. Now, I'll tell you what, Lottie—I must speak it out—if Jack is guilty I believe in his punishment. Yes, I'd hang a murderer; and, above all, a fellow who would coolly go and murder a feeble old man for his money. But, Lottie, I don't believe Jack did it. You see the money wasn't taken, the silver that was in the house wasn't taken—nothing missing unless it is the judge's will, and everybody that knows anything about it, says he kept his will in that safe. I know that the old boot tells hard against him, and then, yesterday, they found a handkerchief with his name marked upon it, in the yard, near the window. It was a red silk handkerchief, with his name in white sewing-silk."

"Oh! Willie," I exclaimed, "don't tell Lottie. See, she is pale as death!" The poor girl was leaning against the dresser in the pantry, her face bloodless, and her blue eyes opened wide and staring at Willie.

"Yes, I will tell; she ought to know everything, and then she will understand better, by-and-by, what to do."

"Willie! Willie!" said Lottie, "I marked that handkerchief for Jack on New Year's Day, but he told me, a few weeks afterward, that he had given it away, and I must work him another just like it—but I haven't done it yet."

Here it is," and she opened a drawer in the kitchen and showed it to us."

"Exactly like it!" said Willie, "for I saw the handkerchief in Squire Cushing's office. But who did he give the other to? Who did he give it to?" asked Willie, eagerly.

"I don't know—I don't know," said Lottie. "Do ask him, Willie, please. Perhaps he didn't drop it. He couldn't, you know, if he had given it away."

Lottie's Aunt Lucy was sitting by her little table, binding shoes, when Willie entered, while Susan was cooking the frugal dinner of fish and potatoes. Willie's basket—for he had managed to procure an addition to Lottie's gift—was very acceptable. The poor aunt looked wan and pale, and the sight of Willie brought tears. Almost all the town believed Jack guilty; one or two gentlemen had expressed some doubt, but the community were so struck with horror at the deed, that they looked upon the whole Cheever family as disgraced, and their poor neighbors seemed almost afraid that any kindness to the aunt and children would confound them with the guilty.

It was a long time before I could understand why Willie so stoutly asserted his belief in Jack's innocence.

"Mrs. Lucy, I am going to the jail to see if they will admit me," said Willie.

"I guess they will, Willie," said the aunt; "and it is so kind in you to do it." The tears dropped upon her work. "Oh, Willie, can we live through it?"

"The trial don't come on for some weeks yet, and who knows what may happen? If Jack's innocent, I guess it will be made to appear."

"I hope so—I hope so," said the old lady; "but it is difficult sometimes to prove one's innocence."

"Ay, but they must *prove his guilt!* That's it, Mrs. Lucy."

Willie was beginning to make quite a display of his legal acquirements.

Willie was admitted to Jack's cell, but had no conversation with him save in the presence of an officer. When Jack heard of the finding of the handkerchief, he appeared much troubled.

"Ay! ay! Willie, it will go hard against me. I wish I hadn't been such a bad fellow before, and then people would believe my word; but no matter what I say, I can't be trusted. I suppose I deserve it for being such a good-for-nothing brother!"

"Jack, about the handkerchief?"

"I haven't had that handkerchief in my possession since—let me see"—and he studied a moment—"since the twentieth day of January last."

"Who did you give it to?"

"Ay, my boy, that won't do! Jack Cheever is bad enough without turning informer."

Willie was walking from the jail toward his home, wondering how he could learn more of what seemed to him a mystery, when he met John Martin, a boy in the same class at the public school.

The boy was much excited: "Come on, Will—come on, quick! I haven't told any of the other boys. Come, see what I've found!"

Will thought only of a stray bird's nest, or a treasure in the old ruins. "Is it far?" he asked.

"No, only down here by the church on the corner. I haven't touched it yet, but I am *sure* there's blood on it."

The boy ran on ahead, certain now that Willie was following. They came to the church, to a narrow alley behind it, where, in a hole under the old steps which led to the vestry, they saw a club with what appeared to be a loaded head. There was a dark stain upon the head, and also on the handle, and, as Willie knelt to examine it more closely, he saw two or three white hairs clinging to it. For a moment he felt a cold shudder come over him; but his caution did not forsake him. "John, you stay around here, not very nigh, but in sight, while I go down to State street for Squire Cushing."

The sentinel was faithful, and the lawyer soon had possession of the weapon, which he felt sure had some connection with the death of Judge Webb.

We had no school on the day of the funeral. My father and Willie were present. I sat at the parlor window and watched the long procession on their way to the cemetery. The Kents were the chief mourners, and were in the first carriage. I saw James and Kitto, and I thought they looked very grave and pale. Mrs. Ross, and Helen, and Robert March came next. It was wrong in me, I suppose, but I thought what a fine-looking couple Robert and Helen were, and I said so to my mother.

"Yes," she said, "but Helen will marry James Kent, and she thinks him a very handsome young man. Now, I suppose, he will be very rich, as there has been no will found. I did hope," she added, "that the judge would leave a few thousands to Robert, and an annuity to Mrs. Ross; but, it is so too often in life—those who need it most are forgotten."

It was a very large funeral, and the whole town was quiet and solemn. Business was suspended, and the spectators turned pale as they looked upon the hearse, and thought of the horror of that midnight death.

The day after the funeral, a message came from Squire Cushing to the Kent family, and to Mrs. Ross and Helen, requesting them to meet him at the Webb mansion, at two o'clock, P. M. As that hour drew nigh, he asked Robert March to go with him. "I may need you as witness," he said.

As Robert entered the room where he had so often sat with the judge, what sad memories came over him. There was the familiar easy-chair in which his mother sat on that last evening when she bade him forget what was dearest to him in life, save herself; and there, too, sat the judge at three o'clock, P. M., only a few hours before his death, talking of business, and as absorbed in this life, as if no other stretched beyond in the illimitable future. Robert was not disappointed; he had been told that he must expect nothing from the rich man's store. He had been so thankful for the present received when he left the house, and had made such good use of it, that he felt now strong to carve out his own fortune. Once only when he looked at Helen, so beautiful even in her plain dress, did

the thought cross his mind: "For her sake, I would like to change places with James Kent." The passing thought led him to look at that gentleman, and he was surprised to see him so pale and haggard, with his eyes fixed on the lawyer, as if he expected that gentleman to pronounce his death-sentence, instead of confirming his claim to a hundred thousand. Kitto, too, wore no expression of pleasure, but the same dogged, stupid look of low cunning which had become habitual to him.

Mrs. Kent was restless, and rose to open the door, as if she felt oppressed with the atmosphere of the room. Even Mrs. Ross, usually so quiet, looked as if she would like to know what Squire Cushing wanted of her. Helen, alone, was serene, though the place itself could not awaken any cheerful emotions.

"I came here," said the lawyer, "in compliance with the wish of the deceased, who made me promise to perform this duty. I now hold in my hand the last will and testament of Judge Webb."

There was a perceptible commotion in the Kent family-group. James stared at Kitto like an enraged tiger; then the fire disappeared from his face, and he became more deadly pale than before. Kitto looked at his mother with a singular expression of incredulity and surprise.

"I thought there was no will," murmured Mrs. Kent, almost inaudibly.

Lawyer Cushing studied their faces with a quick, rapid glance, before which each member of the family shrunk. It was a glance which looked into their hearts.

He then slowly proceeded to read the document, which he had produced from his breast-pocket. Stripped of its legal phrases, its purport was as follows: To Mrs. Kent, a life annuity of two thousand dollars. The remainder of the large estate, saving some legacies to the Seamen's Friend Society and to the Town Library, was to be divided equally among the four following persons, namely: James Webb Kent, Kitto Webb Kent, Helen Wadsworth Ross, and Robert March. The last named individuals were so taken by surprise, that they involuntarily glanced at each other, and "What can this mean?" was expressed in the face of each. The disappointment and rage of James and Kitto was too evident to escape notice. There was a sullen glare upon the face of the latter, which, Helen Ross afterward said, was fearful to look upon.

Mrs. Ross and Mr. Kent were perhaps the most satisfied individuals in the group; neither was named in the will.

Squire Cushing and Robert walked back to the office together. "Well, young man, and how do you feel, becoming suddenly rich with one stroke of a pen?"

"I feel as if it were all a dream, sir; I can not believe it. I must think it over and sleep upon it, sir."

"And wake to find it real," said the lawyer.

"Robert," said Squire Cushing, "I have strange thoughts to-day—strange thoughts, Robert," and he came and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Robert March, I congratulate you. You have been a good son, and a prudent, industrious young man, and will. I

trust, make a good use of your money. God bless you. But Robert, I have horrible thoughts—horrible! I can't shake them off: and I would sooner lose my right hand than give them speech."

The lawyer paced his office back and forth with hasty strides, now and then stopping and laying his hand on Robert's shoulder, as the latter sat at a desk before a pile of papers.

"Robert, do you believe in a devil?"

"So I have been taught from childhood," said Robert, "and it would be difficult for me now to reason myself out of that belief. Yes, sir; I believe in a devil—in an actual spirit of evil."

"Well, if ever there was a devil made suggestions to a man, there's one making them to me, and I can't 'down' with the tempter. The more I try, the stronger he puts the case, and piles on the arguments, till I think he'll make me believe him. But he's a liar, isn't he?"

"The good book says he is the father of lies; but, you are talking in an unknown tongue to me."

"Well, I'm glad of it. I'm glad you can't look into my heart to night. Such horrible thoughts, suspicions, fears, are within me that I feel as if my soul was polluted by its unclean tenants. Ugh! There's no sweet sleep for me to-night. I'd fain wash seven times in Jordan, if, thereby, I could be free from these tormenting thoughts."

Robert looked at the lawyer and was troubled.

"Suppose, sir, I bring your horse round and we ride. The fresh air will do you good."

"Right; let us have sunshine and the sweet breath of Heaven, to chase away these thoughts that come to me straight from the bottomless pit."

For once in a long life, the unfortunate Mr. Kent was at ease. The racking cares of life had worn deep furrows in his brow, had bowed his form and whitened his hair. Two thousand a year was ample for his wants, and he returned from the reading of the will with a restful feeling, to which he had been a stranger for many a long year.

Laying aside the new suit of black, and putting on his old coat and slippers, he sat down to read the newspaper. His wife, who had remained at the old mansion to give some directions to the housekeeper, entered soon afterward and found her husband asleep over his paper.

"Well, John Kent, you take it quietly, upon my word!" she remarked, angrily, as she shook him roughly.

"How should I take it, Sally? I don't want to go out and shout in the streets, nor run round to the neighbors and tell them of our good fortune. But, indeed, I am thankful—so thankful that we have a competence for our old age, that, like Paul after the long tempest, when he saw the port of the Three Taverns, I thank God and take courage."

"Well, really; and so this is your state of mind! Thankful for the pittance of two thousand a year—thankful that one-half of that large estate has gone to strangers, when the whole of it should have been ours."

"Why, Sally, as far as it regards Helen Ross,

what difference does it make with James? They will be married now."

"I don't know about that—I don't know. Helen Ross is no favorite of mine, as you well understand. I had hoped when James came into his property, he would give up this foolish fancy, and marry into a richer, better family."

Mr Kent rubbed his eyes and sat erect in his chair.

"I don't understand you, Sally. Helen Ross is a beauty, and a good, dutiful daughter. I can't see your objection, now that she has the other requisite—a fortune."

"Never mind what you can't see. You never were very quick-sighted, or quick-witted, either."

"Well, perhaps not—perhaps not, Sally. One thing is certain—I have not been a successful man. This is the only bit of good-fortune that has ever been given to me. Let us rest and be thankful."

"Rest! When so much injustice has been done! Rest! No, I'll never rest till that will is broken! Robert March! A mere beggar to be made equal to *my* children! He has tampered with the old man, or with his will."

"I was a little surprised, I must confess, that the judge gave him so much, but I supposed he would leave him a few thousands."

"I know more about it than you do," and here the woman paused a moment. She had never told her husband of her midnight discovery. "I knew what my brother's intentions were—coaxed into it, I suppose, by Cushing. He has played his part well. Fifty thousand to go into that firm. I say I knew what my brother's intentions were, but I hoped, as there was no will found in the safe, he had thought better of it and permitted his own flesh and blood to have their full rights."

"Sally, it is strange that the old gentleman didn't keep his will there. Such has always been the impression. I wonder what Jack Cheever did get for his great crime."

"Plenty of money, you may be sure. Cushing himself said that the estate was not as large as was supposed, by many thousands. It is my opinion that Jack Cheever knew of a large amount deposited there, and took it, but was cunning enough to leave a part."

"You may be right; I think you are. It is strange that a more thorough search has not been made for it."

"We'll let Jack Cheever alone. The law will hang him as he deserves. But the will! I mean to break it if it can be done."

Mr. Kent shook his head.

"It can't be done—it can't be done, Sally. Better let well enough alone; we have enough—let us enjoy it."

"But we have debts, incurred with the expectation of receiving an abundance from my brother."

"We have no debts now but such as were incurred for James and Kitto. *Their* money must pay them. You and I, Sally, will have our annuity, and enjoy it. I am satisfied, I wish you would be also."

"You were always so—no ambition, no energy. If you had been like me, we shouldn't have been dependent on a brother."

"Very true, very true, Sally. I have always been running after fortune, but she has always been too fleet of foot for me. Now that I have a piece of her robe, I am *satisfied*."

Mrs. Kent flung herself out of the room, muttering:

"Nothing can be done with *him*. I'll see James."

James was not at home. Squire Cushing and Robert had met James Kent and Helen Ross in their ride. They, too, were in a chaise, enjoying the soft spring evening, and riding leisurely through High street, that beautiful avenue, which is the pride of the town. The grass was fresh and green, and the trees were just beginning to open their leaf-buds to the soft southern breeze. There was a sweet, serene expression on the face of Helen, very lovely to look upon.

Squire Cushing, who was a quick observer, noticed it. "I think her name should have been *Serena*," he said, as their carriages passed each other, and she bowed smilingly to the gentlemen. There are few faces more winning than hers. I always think of a white dove when I see her."

Robert made no reply, but in his heart how he longed that the white dove should fly to him.

"And there's James," continued the lawyer, "a handsome fellow, too, in his way, but how different their types! What a keen black eye he has, and how quick and lithe in his movements. Helen is, perhaps, a little slow, just enough to give one the idea of ease and grace."

"To what would you compare *him*?" said Robert.

"If you will not think the comparison invidious, I should say the tiger. Now, I think the tiger a very handsome animal, and I always linger at his cage in a menagerie. He is fierce and cruel, but he moves with celerity and with grace too. I am not certain that James Kent is not crafty and cruel by nature, but with an easy fortune, and Helen Ross for a wife, such traits would be kept in abeyance."

Robert made no reply, and there was silence for a few minutes; but it was suddenly interrupted by a sharp cut given to the horse by the lawyer. "Come, Countess, let us have a trial of your muscles. What do you say to a good three-fifty trot on the turnpike, Robert? That devil is at me again. I wonder if I can't run away from him?"

Robert smiled, and quoted the passage, "'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' But are you sure it is a devil, squire?"

The lawyer turned sharply and looked at Robert. "I thought it must be, because the feeling was so horrible and ugly. Speaking of resisting the devil reminds me of Deacon Morse. He said that when he awoke one Sunday morning, the words of an old drinking song which he had learned in his youth, occurred to him. He couldn't get rid of it. It haunted him in his morning prayer; it was in his head all breakfast time; it went with him to church, and at every pause in the sermon, try hard as he would, the foolish, profane lines would intrude themselves. When he sat down to dinner to say grace, he came very near repeating a verse of the song. Wearied, at last, he thought to try an experi-

ment. He went into his barn, and there sung the whole song in a loud, clear voice. *That* 'did the business,' as he expressed it. The devil had his due, and annoyed him no more. He was able to spend the Lord's Day in a proper manner."

"Suppose you try the experiment, squire," said Robert.

"I think I will," said the lawyer, "if I am not cured by sleep, and I'll make you my father-confessor."

"I was not seeking that office, sir. I would recommend Parson Andrews."

"Heaven forbid, Robert! The good man would send me forthwith to a lunatic asylum as a penance. I hope for more mercy at your hands."

"I shall try to do my duty, sir, and proportion the penance to the guilt."

"Whew!" said the lawyer, and shrugged his shoulders. "I must be prepared for something severe then."

Countess was now stepping away at the rate of one mile in four minutes, by Robert's watch, which he held in his hand, and the two gentlemen were getting interested—for the squire was very proud of his mare—when a wretched-looking woman, clothed in rags, with an old black hood on her head, rose from a stone by the side of the road, and extended a paper toward the gentlemen.

The lawyer saw the woman, but was too intent watching his mare to heed her. "The old woman must wait," he said. She screamed out at the top of her voice: "Take it, squire; you'll be sorry if you don't. It's life or death to somebody, perhaps."

Robert heard the words, but the squire did not, and drove on to the next mile-stone, where he slackened rein, and allowed the animal to return gradually to her usual pace. On looking back, Robert perceived the old woman sitting upon the stone from whence she had risen a moment before, evidently waiting for their return to town. "Suppose we drive back and see what the old creature wants," said Robert.

"At the expense of a dollar to our pockets," replied the lawyer.

"Perhaps so," said Robert, "but her manner excited my curiosity."

They returned, and Robert, being upon that side, held out his hand for the paper; but the old woman refused to give it to him, and hobbled round to the other side of the carriage. "It is for you, squire, and you only," she said, and then turned at once into a little lane which led into a piece of dense wood. The lawyer tore off the envelope and Robert noticed a sudden pallor of his face as he read. He placed the packet in his side pocket; and asked Robert to drive on. "I came out to resist the devil," he remarked, "and now he certainly has appeared to me in the shape of that old woman. I suppose he can assume any form he pleases, can he not, Robert?"

"He sometimes appears as an 'angel of light,' we are told. I think he generally prefers a more attractive form than that repulsive old woman. If I am not mistaken, I saw a bit of scrubby red beard under that old black hood!"

"A beard, did you say? Robert March, I

once explored a great cave, running miles beneath the surface of the earth. My light went out, and for a moment I lost the thread which would lead to the entrance. I never shall forget that moment of perplexity and bewilderment. I feel like that now. This old woman, if woman it be (I have heard of women with beards,) has given me an enigma to solve, and strange to say, my secret thoughts—thoughts which have never been clothed in speech—will solve this enigma. To-morrow, Robert, to-morrow we will talk this over. I will leave you now at your boarding-house. By the way, Mrs. Ross will not keep boarders much longer, I suppose? I am glad that Helen Ross is so fortunate. I wonder *you* didn't get ahead of James Kent, Robert, and secure such a prize."

"I wish," said Robert, "that Helen Ross was not so fortunate—in other words that she hadn't a dollar in the world."

"And I wish," said Squire Cushing, "that Judge Webb had been shipwrecked in the Chinese Sea, forty years ago, and made a peaceful grave where 'pearls lie deep,' as the poet hath it." With such strange wishes the two men parted.

Robert took his tea with Mrs. Ross. Helen had not returned. Mutual congratulations passed, for Mrs. Ross was very fond of Robert, and had loved his mother. While they discussed matters pleasantly and quietly over their tea, James and Helen were riding home through a quiet by-road, and Helen, with blushing cheek and downcast eyes, was listening to those words of love, which James Kent spoke in soft, low tones, that thrilled the heart of the listener: "We need wait no longer, Helen. Your mother can not *now* object to our engagement and our speedy marriage. Say, Helen, shall it not be soon? I want to take you away from this dull town to sunny France—to the old world of our school-day studies. We will spend a year there, and see the storied castles on the Rhine that we read so much about in our childhood, and the cathedrals, gray with age, but full of the echoes of rare music, and will tread the streets of Rome, walking in the shadow of St. Peters, and over the dust of the Cæsars. I want to whisper my love in the old world and the new, on the land and on the sea, in your own little home, and in a palace of ancient Italy. Helen, say, *will* you go with me?"

Won by his ardor, charmed by his passion, moved by his tenderness, it is not strange that the trusting woman forgot her promise to her mother, pledged herself to James Kent, and permitted him to place the ring upon her hand, the signet of her betrothal.

Robert March, noticing the ring, the next morning, at the breakfast-table, remembered the ride of the night before, and, in the language of Scripture, "his heart was exceeding sorrowful."

At the same hour when Mrs. Ross and Robert March were taking tea, when James Kent and Helen were riding slowly home in the twilight of the spring evening, talking of the bright future before them, and a year of pleasure in the old world, poor Aunt Lucy, having finished her long day's labor of shoe-binding, wrapped

herself in her best shawl—an old merino that had seen twenty years of service, but was clean and presentable yet—put on her black straw bonnet and cotton gloves, and with her basket on her arm, told Susan that she was going to Horton's to return her shoes and get some more. "I have some errands to do," she added, "and may not be back for an hour, and you can read your Sunday-school book while I am gone." This was quite a treat to the little girl, who had so few books, and so little leisure to read. Before Aunt Lucy left the house, she went into her bedroom and opening a little wooden trunk brought up from the bottom a small calico bag full of something precious, for the old lady looked at it very tenderly, and fastened it with great care under her dress. Then she knelt by the bedside and prayed, and as she prayed, the tears trickled through her thin fingers. She arose, wiped them away, and went out into the street. She kept her hand by her side, as if she feared the little bag might escape, and walked very rapidly to the shoe-shop, where she refilled the basket, and leaving it to be called for, she turned into High street, and walked slowly in the shadow of the large elms that line that noble avenue. Her head was bowed, and her steps were not firm. Poor Aunt Lucy! the trouble of the last week had told terribly upon her frame, already weak from hard labor and scanty food. She came to one of the finest houses on the street. It stood on a rise of ground which was neatly terraced, and planted with choice shrubbery. A broad walk led to a side door, and thither the old lady bent her steps; but she stood, doubtful, a moment, at the door, and then, gathering courage, gave two faint knocks with the brass knocker.

"Can I see Squire Cushing?" she asked, of a tidy colored girl who opened the door.

The girl told her that the squire was at home, and waited upon her into the library, a bright, cheerful room, in which the candles had already been lighted.

Squire Cushing had taken a bath and dressed for tea, which was on the table and waiting for him. He was weary, hungry, and, if it must be confessed, a little nervous. He wanted his tea and the excitement of a pleasant chat with his wife and daughter. He thought he would see no one on business that night; but when Chloe said: "A woman is very anxious to see you, sir," he thought of the old woman on the turnpike, and curiosity led him at once to the library. He was surprised to see Aunt Lucy.

"I came," she said, her voice trembling and her eyes full of tears, "Squire Cushing, to know if you will defend my poor boy. I think he is innocent, though everything looks so dark for him. I have brought you all the money I have in the world," and she took out the little calico bag. "Here are a hundred silver dollars. I have saved them for the days of sickness, and to buy my shroud and coffin, that I might not be dependent upon charity at that time; but I'll willingly die in the poor-house, and have a pauper's burial, if only Jack's innocence can be made to appear."

The lawyer looked at the poor, worn face, turned so pleadingly toward him; at the little

calico bag on the table, and then put his hand in his side-pocket, to make sure that the packet was safe.

"I am sorry, deeply sorry for you, Mrs. Lucy, but appearances are very much against Jack."

"I know it, sir; but is it not possible that appearances may be against him, and yet he be innocent?"

"I have found such cases often in my practice. But, if Jack is guilty, you would not have him shielded from the penalty of his crime, even if I had the power to do it?"

The tears ran down the poor old withered face, but she answered decidedly:

"No, sir! Jack has been a wild, heedless boy, but I know—indeed I know—he never committed this awful crime."

"You know, I suppose, that if a man is accessory to the crime, even if he did not strike the blow, he is considered legally guilty, and will be punished accordingly. Now, are you sure that Jack knew nothing about the murder?"

The poor woman's voice faltered as she said:

"I think he knows more than he is willing to tell; but Jack will suffer himself rather than turn informer."

"That is wrong—all wrong, Mrs. Lucy. I will see Jack. Take your money, and wait at least till I do something for you before you part with your hard-earned money."

When she had gone, the lawyer took the paper from his pocket and examined it carefully:

"Look out for higher game; it is better to hunt the fox than the partridge, and in your hunting-grounds there are deer, if you can only get the hounds."
BOXER."

"Come, husband, our tea has been waiting a long time. Come, forget business for a while," and a soft hand was laid upon his shoulder.

The reply was a kiss and an arm thrown about her waist, and thus they walked to the dining-room. The room was pleasant, the table bright with silver and china, and fragrant with coffee and steak.

"Yes, Carrie, I *will* forget all trouble and business for this evening," and with wife and daughter, and paper and music, he exorcised the demon that had annoyed him so much.

The jail was a massive stone building, about a mile from the center of the town. Jack's cell was neither damp nor filthy; his food was coarse but wholesome, and he had a Bible and one or two other books. But the solitude and the idleness were terrible to him, and he fretted so under them that he grew thin and pale.

It was now dark in the cell. Jack's supper of bread and water was still untouched, but he had thrown himself down, hopeless of any relief, and trying to reconcile his mind to the terrible death which he thought was before him, for he was sure he could not clear himself from suspicion. The key turned in the door and his aunt stood before him. "Jack, I have been to Squire Cushing!"

"Well, did he tell you I was a poor, miserable dog, and he hoped they'd hang me?"

"No, Jack."

"Well, if he didn't say so, I *am*; and if it

were not for the disgrace to you and the girls, I'd like to be hung to-morrow."

"Jack, Jack, don't talk so. No, the squire was *very* kind, and there was something in his manner that led me to think he is not so certain of your guilt as the rest of the world. He is coming to see you to-morrow."

For a moment Jack's eyes brightened, and he looked eagerly at his aunt; but the next instant the cloud returned, and he said: "Aunt, it is of no use. The more I say, the more guilty I shall appear. Squire Cushing *can't* clear me."

"Jack," said the poor aunt, laying her hand upon his shoulder, "I would die for you; you know how gladly I would take your place in this cell."

"I believe you, aunt; but I am unworthy of your devotion."

"Will you tell Squire Cushing all you said, all you did, and where you were, on the night of the murder, for the three hours you were away from home?"

Jack did not reply.

"Jack, my boy, I don't ask you to tell *me*, but I ask you to tell the squire, and I ask it as if I were on my death-bed, and were making my last request—for your sisters' sake as well as for your own."

Jack looked at the poor, broken-hearted woman, and thought of all she had suffered for him. He hesitated a moment:

"Yes, aunt, I will for your sake and the girls' sake," and just then they came to lock up the jail for the night, and Aunt Lucy went to her sad home.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RIGHT SCENT.

THE town of Norbury is very well laid out, the original settlers evidently having a regard to health and some love of order. The streets slope to the water's edge, and the broad, deep gutters carry to the river the melted snow in winter and the rains of summer. High street, which runs parallel with the river, and overlooks the lower part of the town, is a broad, beautiful avenue, adorned with venerable elms, which fling their shadows over well-built but antiquated houses, surrounded with lawns, and indicating, by their appearance, opulence and comfort. Upon this street there is a park, in which is a large pond, the delight of boys in winter, and of all classes of population in the heat of summer. Norbury is a quiet old town, with some traces left of its more thriving days, when its merchant-princes sent ships to Canton and Calcutta, and its learned divines and erudite schools were known in the old world and the new. Its ancient glory has departed, but it still is a pleasant home for those who, weary of the whirl of city life, like quiet sea-bathing and old-fashioned ways. There is some business done there yet, and every day vessels leave for the West Indies, or our Southern ports, and little fleets go annually to the fishing-grounds of our northern seas. Water street, running by the river-side, is, at some seasons of the year, quite lively; but the number of liquor-shops, sailors' boarding-houses, tobacconists, chop-houses and the like, render it no pleasant walk, especially in the season of fish-curing—in which

occupation many of the dwellers in the lower part of the street are employed.

In the lower part of a sailors' boarding-house, on water street, was a small shop for the sale of books, writing-paper, pen-knives, pocket-books, and many other similar articles, which sailors often buy and put away in their chests when going on a long voyage. It was a low, dingy place, and directly overhead was a room where sailors' ready-made garments were sold, and a red shirt and tarpaulin hat were hanging from the window. In a dark, small room in the rear, two young men were sitting, during the same evening of the day on which the will was read.

It was nearly midnight. James Kent had taken the night train of cars, and was on his way to Boston; the moon had gone down, but he sat by the window and looked out into the starlight, and upon the broad salt meadows, over which the night-breezes came laden with the smell of the sea, and he longed for the hour when he should be sailing over that sea with his betrothed.

One single candle burned in the back room of the stationer's shop, but the wick was long and covered with shrouds, and its light scarcely revealed the features of the two occupants. One was in black clothes and rather more carefully dressed than usual for a frequenter of this part of the street. But Kitto Kent had been to the old brick mansion to hear his uncle's will read, and had not yet laid aside the mourning suit worn on that occasion, and his hair and whiskers still showed the handiwork of the barber. Kitto had a grave expression of face (almost all miserly people have), and he sat by the table, leaning one arm upon it, and looking his companion in the face with an eager, anxious expression, as if he feared to lose one word. His companion wore the dress of a sailor—a pea-jacket, loose trowsers, and a red shirt, the collar of the same tied with a black ribbon, very loosely, exposing the throat, which was thick and red. An old cap, that had seen much service, covered his head, but was pushed over to one side, showing a mass of thick, unkempt, sandy hair. He had whiskers of the same dull, red hue, short and stubby. The light was dim, and he sat with his back to the table, so that Kitto had only a side view of his face. His hands were in his pockets, and he leaned back in his chair in a very nonchalant manner, quite in contrast to his companion's attitude of unrest.

"I say, Kit, I won't take off one cent. It's five thousand down to-night or to-morrow morning. I shall go to Boston and ship for a long voyage this week, if I get the money, and if I don't get it, you'll be sorry. Where's your brother? Too much of a gentleman, hey, to come down here to see me, to-night."

"James has gone to Boston!"

"The dogs he has!" said the sailor, roused somewhat from his apparent indifference.

"You needn't be alarmed," replied Kitto; "he'll be back in three days. His plan is to be married, if he can persuade Helen Ross to consent to a wedding so soon after the death of my uncle; if not, he will go abroad by himself, and remain a year in Europe."

The sailor did not reply for a moment, but put his hands deeper into his pockets, and whis-

tled. The other watched him narrowly, and said: "Under the circumstances, it seems to me you ought to take less. I'll give you a thousand down, to-night," and he opened a small trunk and laid upon the table a bag of gold, and proceeded to count the contents. The sailor did not remove his hands from his pockets, but wheeled his chair round a little, so that he could see the operation.

"All right," he said, as the little piles of eagles and half-eagles lay before him. "Now count me out fifteen hundred more, and you will be all right. I'll run my risk with James."

"I can't do it," said Kitto, as he grasped a ten-dollar piece in his hand; "there's no more here, as you can see by the empty bag."

"Your note will do; it will be good at any bank now," said the sailor, coolly.

"You are rather hard, as I said before, under the circumstances. To be sure you brought the ship in, but the cargo was of small value compared to our expectations."

The sailor laughed—a coarse, low chuckle it was, and not pleasant: "Ha! ha! You are a cautious chap, Kit, and always were long-headed. 'I brought the ship in.' Yes, I did. Ha! ha! but, if I was captain, I had a first-mate to that ship. You can't dispute *that*, and we'll sail in the same ship on a longer voyage, perhaps, my mate!" and he leered at Kitto and chuckled again that low, hateful chuckle. "What do you say, my hearty?"

Kitto said nothing, but looked at his companion with the same eager look as before, as if he would fathom, if possible, the lowest depth of the sailor's heart. The sailor did not notice this look, but, with his hands in his pockets, which he had removed only for the purpose of putting a fresh quid of tobacco in his mouth, he now aimed at a barrel of waste paper, and, having "hit the mark" with tobacco-juice, to his satisfaction, he rose, and to the surprise of Kitto, thus held forth:

"Kitto Kent! once for all, that money, or you and I sail again in the same ship. You are a tight one, everybody knows, but fifty thousand dollars will be a fortune in Norbury. True, you expected four times as much. I can't help that. I've been knocked round the world till I don't much care when I'm knocked out of it; if I had my choice, I'd rather be swung out by my shipmates, and have a 'Heave ho!' for a benediction, than a land-funeral, with mourners in long toggery, and a parson to mumble prayers over my grave. But it don't much matter, after all. I say, 'Live well, if you die poor.' Now, my mother hasn't the sweetest temper, as you know, and there's no love lost between us; but she is my mother, nevertheless, and as I never expect to see her again, I've a notion to leave her some money. Now, you didn't hear her name in the will, did you, or don't you know all that is in it? Perhaps you didn't hear it all?"

Kitto moved uneasily in his chair; the conversation was not pleasant to him. The sailor went on:

"My ship will sail this week for Columbia River. I know where to find James. Pay me fifteen hundred more and I'll give you a receipt in full. I'll call here to-morrow morning for

the last time, and if I don't find the money ready, then perchance you and I will take a voyage in the same ship again. Good-night," and the sailor went out of the shop without looking back.

When Kitto was left alone he opened the little trunk and counted over its contents. He was not satisfied with the result; he was pale and haggard, but he did not seek rest, and walked the room, or sat and leaned his head upon the table all the night. The candle had burned down, and was sputtering in the socket; the light of early morning was struggling through the small, dingy window, when Kitto Kent rose, took all the money from his box and fastened it in a leather belt round his body, and went out into the street, taking the direction of the chain bridge, which crosses the river northeast of the town. After walking perhaps half a mile, he returned, re-entered his room and wrote upon a slate near the door: "Gone to Rowley; will return to-morrow;" he then deposited the key where the shop-boy would find it, and went out again, but *not* toward Rowley.

James Kent was in a luxurious chamber in the old Tremont Hotel, Boston; he had ordered breakfast at ten, in his own room, and was meanwhile occupied in writing a long letter to Helen Ross. Robert March had taken breakfast at an early hour, as usual, with Mrs. Ross and Helen—the latter looking fresh and lovely in her neat gingham morning-dress, and was social with Robert, more so than usual, he thought, and he understood *why* as he glanced at the plain gold ring upon her engagement finger. He was not in a fit mood to do business that day, though, fortunately for him, there was not much to be done, as Mr. Cushing was not to be found.

The sailor, with whom we parted at midnight, came out, about nine o'clock, of the door of a sailors' boarding-house on Water street, a little unsteady in his gait, and very careless in his dress. He made his way to Kitto Kent's shop, and found a little boy waiting upon two sailors who were buying some penknives. He inquired for Kitto, and on being shown the slate, swore a terrible oath, and staggered to a chair, where he sat down, and letting his head fall upon the table, fell asleep. He did not hear the remark of one of the sailors who knew him: "What, old fellow—half-seas over so early in the day?" Failing to rouse him, they went out and left him asleep.

"Where's the squire this morning?" "Squire in?" "What has become of the squire?" These were the changes rung in Robert March's ear for some hours. It seemed as if everybody wanted the squire, just at the time when he could not be found in his house or office. But, there he was, locked up in his private room that opened into the office, and heard all these inquiries, and still sat in his arm-chair smoking his cigar, once in a few minutes taking it from his mouth, knocking a little of the white ashes from it, and then dropping into a reverie and forgetting even, for a few minutes, to put it back again. Then he would puff again vigorously for awhile; a second cigar followed, and all the time the lawyer kept up a terrible think-

ing. As the smoke of the cigar curled up and passed away, the smoke from his thoughts cleared also.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "that such a horrible thought should ever enter my mind after seeing the bloody corpse. No woman's hand dealt that blow. Why, a common policeman knows a wound inflicted by a woman, and I should not have shown myself more ignorant; and yet—and yet, a will *was* there the day before the murder, and was *not* there afterward—a will just like, in all its provisions, the true document which I had in custody! The old gentleman was right in his suspicions: some one had opened the safe, and knew the disposition made of the property. Poor Kent has the simplicity and kindness of a child, and the courage of—a hare. We'll put him one side. No woman wielded the heavy club that broke with one blow the skull of the sleeper; we will send that horrible thought to its lying author. Some villain, desperate for money; but who admitted him into the house?"

The reader will remember that Judge Webb's room and that of the housekeeper were separated by an entry, and that the only window in that entry was securely fastened, and found so after the murder; but the door, which had a lock and bolt, was unfastened and left open, the murderer having entered by a window in the rear, and through the door, which must have been designedly left open. Jack Cheever, no doubt, knew the house—had often been there, and the handkerchief and boot were presumptive proofs that he *was* there on that night.

Now, the lawyer knew better than little Willie the power and the weakness of circumstantial evidence; he knew what a high authority in law has laid down: "Until it pleases Providence to give us means beyond those our present facilities afford, of knowing things done in secret, we must act on presumptive proof, or leave the worst crimes unpunished." Then Jack was poor and sometimes reckless; the old man's money-chest often had been talked about among the boys, and Jack might have been tempted to the great crime. Still, the lawyer was slow to believe him guilty. The very fact of his going back to his own home and bed was evidence in his favor. Then everybody thought him guilty, and the lawyer, with his practice of looking on the other side, wanted to make them out in the wrong. Thus he kept on thinking, till, in the middle of the third cigar, he suddenly threw it aside and walked out, to the astonishment of Robert, who had not known he was in the building. "The squire in?" he inquired of Robert.

The latter replied, laughing: "No, he is engaged with a client from a far country."

"Ay! ay! my boy," said the squire, "I have no confessions to make. Do you remember when one of the old monks was tempted by the devil in the shape of a woman who appeared in his cell, he heated the tongs red-hot and applied them to her nose. Well, I have met, resisted and conquered my tempter."

"And shall have your reward," said Robert, handing him a check, which had been brought in by a client for services rendered.

"James," said the squire to his office boy,

"bring the horse and chaise round. Robert, I shall not be in the office to-day. Any business that needs my attention must lie over till to-morrow." The chaise was brought, and the squire, in a few minutes afterward, was in Jack Cheever's cell.

"Now, Jack," said the lawyer, "I do not think you murdered Judge Webb, but you—"

Before he could go further, poor Jack, who hadn't wept since his mother died, when he was a mere child, bowed his head, and the tears flowed freely.

"Squire Cushing, God is my witness, I wouldn't have hurt a hair of his old head."

The wary, world-wise lawyer had heard just such asseverations of innocence from criminals guilty of the worst crimes, but he looked at Jack, and said within himself: "I defend this poor fellow." He went on, however, with his sentence, apparently not noticing the tears or the remark: "but you will probably be hung for it, unless you choose to make a full confession. There is strong presumptive evidence against you; the community demand that some one should suffer for that crime, and suspicion attaches only to you. A full confession will not injure another, for the real culprit is, before this time, beyond the reach of the law. Your confession may save yourself from death, and your broken-hearted aunt and your little sisters from great sorrow and disgrace worse than death."

Jack thought a moment and then asked:

"Did you say, squire, that the real murderer would be beyond the reach of the law by this time?"

"Of course, unless he's a fool, or insane."

Jack took from his pocket a ten dollar bill. "Squire, do you think I'd murder a man for that?"

"I can not think so, Jack."

"I believe you, sir; but take it—please take it from me; it burns in my pocket. I suppose I did help to murder the old man for that."

"But, Jack, what did you say just now?"

"The truth, sir."

"But, don't you know that the accessory is as guilty as the principal?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir; but I suppose I did help to murder the judge for ten dollars. But if I am going to confess, I might as well begin at the beginning and tell you all I know about it. My story is short."

"Tell the whole," said the lawyer, a little more stern and short than before, in his manner.

Jack's confession was very brief, and the only remark the lawyer made when he heard it, was: "I'll be here again to-morrow, Jack. I must go now."

The lawyer drove immediately to the police station, and said to the chief: "You know the old Currier house, on the turnpike?"

"Yes, it is not occupied now."

"I'll send the key to you in the course of ten minutes; I want you to take a small force, well armed, and have them secreted in that house. Be cautious about attracting attention, but be on the watch. I will ride past there early this evening. You are aware I go there almost daily to see my farm. If you see an old woman with

a black hood and a long gray cloak sitting on a stone by the roadside, keep a close watch upon her movements. She may give me a paper when I ride that way. Arrest her immediately after that. Be on the alert; don't let her escape, and be secret in your movements. Make no report to the paper of your doings."

The lawyer, having finished his morning's work, went home to dinner, rather satisfied with the result of his solitary thinking. His evening ride was taken alone; the result exceeded his anticipations. The old woman was there again upon the same stone, and presented him a paper as he passed. The lawyer took it and rode on; but he was not out of sight before the capture was made, though the attacking party had hard work of it, for the old woman proved to be a man armed to the teeth, and two of the policemen were severely wounded.

The paper read as follows:

"Offer a reward large enough (five thousand say), and you will be put upon the right track, and astonish the town.—BOXER, for the last time."

That very night the squire was on his way to Boston, sleeping soundly all night in the cars, and ready for an early breakfast at his hotel. When that meal was concluded he turned to his memorandum-book—"John Green, schooner North Star, Henderson, master."

"Now for a journey to the North Star." Ordering a cab, he gave certain directions to the driver which were implicitly followed, but they didn't lead to the North Star. Three or four hours were spent in a fruitless search, till toward night it was ascertained that the North Star had actually moved southward, and Captain Henderson with her, and was by that time in Havana. But the lawyer found out the owner of the North Star, and learned that a swift clipper ship was to start immediately for Havana, and thither, in this same clipper, went an agent for Squire Cushing to Havana.

"You say your schooner, North Star, came into port on the tenth of April?" asked the lawyer.

"Announced at six A. M., and was lying at the wharf by ten A. M., April 10th."

"All right," said the lawyer, "come and swear that before a magistrate."

Squire Cushing was enjoying his dinner at six o'clock, when James Kent entered the dining-room of the Tremont, and seated himself opposite the squire. He had ordered supper before they recognized each other.

"Ha! you here, James? Glad of it; want to see you: but it is no place here for what I have to say; but I think we are on the right track now. But, never mind, we'll talk of something else," he said, as he observed the waiters near him.

They talked upon indifferent subjects, and at the close of dinner, the judge whispered to James: "Come to my office as soon as you return to Norbury," and then he whispered a name which made James start back and turn pale. "No wonder it takes you by surprise; but, on second thought, it is what we might have expected from such antecedents. But come to my office and we will consult what steps to take next."

James Kent bowed and replied, "I will call

at your office, squire, as soon as I get home. When do you start?"

"I shall go in the earliest train—five o'clock."

"I can't get off till the noon train," said James. "Good-evening, sir. I will see you tomorrow if possible."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLOW.

DICK LOUD—for my readers may have already recognized, in the old woman with the scrubby red beard, the sailor whom we left asleep in Kitto Kent's shop—sat in his cell and blasphemed God, and cursed himself and his own foolishness for coming within reach of that old fox of a lawyer. He might have known better; and, what added to his misfortune, was his powerlessness to revenge. He knew well enough that Jack was in the same building, but that was only sorry comfort. Then he remembered that he had been thrown into prison without even being charged with crime. His disguise had been stripped from him, the handcuffs put on, and he borne forcibly onward without one accusation of crime. His own guilty conscience had been his only accuser, and he now determined to silence that, and demand why he had been thus treated. When the keeper looked into his cell at night he demanded to know why he had been thus treated.

"Don't know," said the keeper. "Squire Cushing is responsible, and he generally knows what he is about; if you are an innocent man, you'll not stay here long."

Dick muttered threats of revenge, and the keeper, surmising, of course, why he was there, said to himself: "The fellow looks bad enough to deserve hanging."

The matter was soon made clear to the prisoner by a visit from Squire Cushing, who entered the cell unarmed and alone, though the more cautious jailer stood sentinel at the door. The lawyer looked at the coarse features and sinister expression of the sailor, and felt sure that he had caught the villain. "Dick Loud," said he, "I arrest you as the murderer of Judge Webb."

"You'd better prove, in the first place, squire, that I was in town. You're a little too fast, my old lark; you can't catch this old bird with chaff."

"We will not argue the matter, Dick. The evidence is strong against you. If you are not guilty, you will not suffer."

"I don't want nothing to say to you, squire. If I am hauled up here, it's Hubbard and Jones can get me out; you're no friend to me, or you wouldn't have nabbed me up so quick, when I was just handing a letter in a quiet way. When I was the old woman, I could have told you something that would have made you open your eyes, I guess; but you've lost the chance. I'll carry my news to another market."

The lawyer left him, and Jones and Hubbard, finding that, though his hands were dripping with blood, he had plenty of money, undertook his defense.

It was now well known, that the two young men, Jack Cheever and Dick Loud, were in the County Jail awaiting their trial, which was to take place in June. The people of Norbury

slept more quietly in their beds, though rich old men were more wary than ever in the use of bolts and locks, and the banks had an unusual quantity of plate and specie in their vaults. Poor Aunt Lucy and Susie sewed night and day, and denied themselves the common comforts of life, that they might have money to pay the lawyer for Jack's defense. The poor fellow became more and more despondent, and the squire was very cautious in encouraging any hope of acquittal when he visited him.

Helen Ross was sitting at her window. She saw the broad river where it gave itself, with its wealth of waters, to the great, grasping sea, and far beyond, where white sails dotted the broad expanse of blue, and where sky and water blend. An open three-paged letter lay before her, closely-written, and full of those words of love, so sacred and so dear to the betrothed maiden. He pleaded very earnestly that she would consent to a speedy marriage; he would like a quiet wedding, with no guests save her mother and his own parents, and then they would leave for Europe. He named the very day on which the steamer was to sail, and pleaded eloquently for her consent, reminding her of the years that he had waited—of their love in childhood, and his own lonely life without her. The heart of the white dove fluttered, and she thought of the mother who would be left alone, and she hesitated. She leaned her head upon her hand, and looked out upon the sea and its surroundings for some time. Then she read the letter again.

She laid the letter aside and sought her mother, and by such arguments as daughters know how to use, she drew from her a sad, reluctant consent. Then she returned to her room and sat down to her writing-desk, with the white sheet before her that was to bear upon its pages the words that would make James so happy, while the mother retired to weep.

Kitto Kent, the miserly, unloved brother, was wandering through green fields and shady by-paths on that same day. The little shop-boy wondered why he did not return. Kitto had no love for the woods and fields; he never gathered wild-flowers in his life, nor cared for fishing and hunting. Still he lingered in a little, lonely farm-house, and made an occasional pretense of fishing. "A little too early," said the old farmer, who understood the business. Wearied at last of his solitude, and thinking that, by this time, Dick Loud would be on the sea, he returned to Norbury; but, with his usual caution, he chose the night for his return. It was a dull, gloomy night; there was a fine misty rain, such as is common by the sea at that time of the year. No people were to be seen in the streets; still Kitto looked warily at every turn. As he turned into Federal street, he saw a light in the chamber of the old brick mansion, where so short a time since the terrible tragedy was enacted which made strong men turn pale. It startled him at first, and he paused suddenly; but then, remembering that Mrs. Loud was yet in charge of the place, he started forward again a few steps. Then, as if changing his purpose, he turned and passed into another street, and reached the old shop on Water street by a more

circuitous route. The key was not in its hiding-place, but he had another in his pocket which fitted the lock, and he opened and entered the gloomy little room. Everything was just as he had left it, and he was about to change his coat for an old one which hung against the wall, when a noise startled him. It was as if some one turned the key in the lock of the outer door, but, hearing it no more, Kitto thought it his own fancy, and went on changing his coat. The next moment a strong, heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder. "Kitto Kent, I arrest you as accessory to the murder of your uncle, Judge Webb!" As this was spoken, a second officer of the law slipped the iron handcuffs on the paralyzed, unresisting man.

Both of these ministers of justice seemed to have come out of the ground at his feet, so quick, so noiseless had been their approach. Kitto spoke no word; the light of the dark-lantern, which was now turned upon him, showed a face pale with terror, and he trembled like one seized with a deathly chill. A carriage was at hand, and he was lifted into it, for he was powerless to help himself. Ten minutes later he, too, was in prison, and heard the heavy iron door close upon him, and the grating sound of the half-rusted key as it turned in the lock.

The rain, which had commenced the evening previous, still continued; it was the commencement of one of those long northeast storms which often come in May to dwellers on the seaboard. These spring storms are very depressing—the chilly air, freighted with the moisture from the sea, penetrates to the very heart, and as it continues to blow, sometimes without change for a week at a time, it is very trying to invalids and persons of nervous temperament.

Robert March was not an invalid; he was walking briskly from his office to an early breakfast—for he still boarded with Mrs. Ross—when, on turning the corner of one of the streets leading into Federal, he saw before him Helen Ross, walking with rapid, light step toward her home. She wore a morning-dress and shawl, with a plain straw hat, and Robert could not but notice her graceful, easy carriage and queenly bearing. He overtook her and begged to carry the large umbrella which she held. Helen had been to the post-office to deposit her letter, making sure of its departure in the early mail, for she knew the impatience of James at such times. As Robert and Helen entered the door, the paper-carrier came by, and was about throwing the paper on the step, when, seeing them, he passed on without leaving any. Helen smiled at the omission, and remarked: "He thinks such early walkers must have heard the news," and Robert, who was ignorant as herself of the morning news, called the man to return. He did not hear; whereupon Robert ran on a few steps and took a paper rather unceremoniously from the man's hand, and, with a reproof, turned back without waiting for a reply.

"Just as well, perhaps," muttered the man, "but she is a beautiful creature and gentle and kind. I would have saved her this for a while longer. It must cut close, for it is James Kent's only brother."

Robert March would have cut off his right

hand rather than have given pain to Helen Ross, and yet that same right hand was now giving her that which would, thenceforth, take away the brightness of life from the heart that he would so gladly shield.

Mrs. Ross, Helen, and Robert sat down to the breakfast-table. Helen opened the paper, turned to the inside, glanced a moment at the headings, looked at Robert March for an instant, with those large, dark eyes of hers, as he afterward expressed it, as the poor wounded deer is said to look up when hopeless of escape, and then she attempted to rise; the paper dropped from her hand, and she would have fallen, but Robert was quick, and sprung to save her. He laid her upon the sofa; her mother applied restoratives, and she rallied quickly. Rising to leave the room, she said, "I am better; don't come, mother—I would rather be alone," and she went to her own room.

"What is it, Robert?" said the anxious mother. The paper was already in his hand, and he stood pale and speechless, unable to read, for, indeed, he was horror-stricken. The old lady came and leaned over his shoulder and read; she was calmer than Robert, and laying her hand upon his arm, she said, almost in a whisper: "*Robert, I have feared this!*"

He turned his face toward her, on which was written pain and astonishment.

"You feared this?" he repeated, as if he was bewildered, and had not heard aright.

With her hand still upon his arm, as if she trusted him and needed protection, she said: "A woman's quick instinct sometimes discerns that which man's stronger but slower reason fails to see; but I had hoped and prayed that I might be wrong. Robert, the storm this morning is but the forerunner of a darker, longer storm to my poor Helen. You will not forsake us? Promise to be a brother to her and a son to myself."

Gladly would he have been more than brother and all a son.

The excitement in Norbury was intense, and a great many, perhaps a larger part of the community, would not believe Kitto Kent guilty. Lottie Cheever heard Willie read the arrest from the morning paper. She stood as if suddenly paralyzed, with her large blue eyes fixed on Willie, and I think she was actually more horror-struck than when her own brother was arrested. Every one but Willie shared the feeling: he, naughty boy, as we called him, looked almost exultant. "Why, Willie," said my mother, "you cannot rejoice in the wickedness of such an ungrateful nephew?"

"No, mother," said Willie, "only that the real criminal is brought to justice. You know what old granny Keezet says before a northeast storm—'I know it is coming, because I feel it in my bones.' I have felt it in my bones for a long time that Kitto Kent knew something about that murder."

When old Mr. Kent was dressing that morning he said to his wife:

"Sarah, how pleasant it is for a man to be out of debt. I am thinking every morning when I wake that the one burden of my life has dropped off. I haven't been successful in life, I acknowledge it; and no man, unless he has trod-

den the same path of trying and failing, trying and failing for thirty years, as I have done, knows what a relief a comfortable annuity is to such a man."

"You are contented with a very little," said his wife, "and if you had only been more ambitious and aspiring, I have no doubt my brother would have given us more of his fortune."

"No doubt; no doubt; you had ought to have had a man like the Duke of Marlborough; you remember the name of his duchess was Sarah."

"I was a foolish woman, as all my friends say, Mr. Kent; I might have married a rich man; but, instead of that, it has been drudge, drudge, all my life, and likely to be so still. I have to work as hard as ever. Don't forget to send Jim Hall to nail down the carpet. I shall have the Turkey carpet which was in my brother's drawing-room put down in my parlor."

This conversation took place in the sleeping-room of the Kents. Mrs. Kent seldom read the morning paper herself, but her husband brought it to the breakfast-table.

He did not find it in the hall as usual. I think the carrier, who had a kind heart, and liked the old gentleman, rather hoped he would not find the paper till some friend had communicated the information to him more quietly. But Mr. Kent never allowed himself to be cheated out of his paper, and he searched till he found it in the front yard. He seated himself at table, adjusted his spectacles, and read.

Let us drop the curtain upon that family scene; upon the patient, quiet, suffering of the stricken father, and the loud, hysteric groans, and shrieks of the frantic mother, who heaped curses upon those who had so wrongfully accused her son. And yet, in the occasional lulls of the tempest which swept over her, she remembered her midnight reading of the will, and the telling to her sons the next morning that she had learned its provisions. She recalled now the bitter oath which escaped James's lips, and the dark, stern look upon Kitto's face, and his threat that Robert March should never enjoy the fortune which belonged of right to others. This memory was a dagger piercing her heart.

The grief of the poor, stricken father, was too deep to find relief in words or tears.

Helen Ross wrote another letter on the same day that she mailed one so early in the morning—a letter written in sadness and tears—but thus it ran:

"MY DEAR JAMES:—Think not for one moment that the terrible misfortune which has happened to your family will make any difference in our hopes and plans, as far as I am concerned. My heart impels me to write to you, and say that I share in all your sorrow. Even should your brother be found guilty (which God forbid), I hope to console and strengthen you in this bitter trial. The shock of this accusation will be terrible, and I wish that my letter might reach you before the telegraph dispatch. This cannot be, but believe me, my heart bleeds for you, and I would gladly share the heavy burden. Your mother is overwhelmed, and can see no one. I will go as soon as she permits me. Her greatest consolation will be in seeing you. Come to her.
Ever yours,
HELEN."

The Night Express train is swift! But, rapid as it is, its pace is snail-like to the impatient passenger who sits at one of the car-windows,

and looks eagerly out for the first glimpse of the great city to which the train is bearing him.

"At last!" he exclaims to himself, for he has caught sight of the city that never sleeps, and knows no peaceful night with its soothing shade. The train moves slower as it approaches the depot. He watches carefully, and as soon as the rate of speed permits, he springs to the ground; he waits for no baggage or expressman, but, getting into the first coach on the stand, he orders the driver to Jersey City ferry, where a swift-sailing steamer is about to leave for Europe. She is there! He is in time! Safe! and he takes his berth with a sensation of relief, such as those only understand who have just escaped a great danger.

There is a letter waiting for him in the Boston post-office. Yes, two; but he will not get them—they will wait long, but, the owner *never* will call for them. They are superscribed "James Kent," but, there is no James Kent now. The gentleman who went on board the *Africa*, at early dawn one day, looked like him—the same hair and eyes, and light, agile figure; but, he has booked his name as "John Horton." The *Africa* is not the steamer in which he hoped to sail with his bride to Europe, that is not yet in, and there is still time before its arrival and departure for ample preparations for wedding and voyage.

Kitto Kent is sullen and silent in his confinement. He makes no inquiry for his family, and saving the one question: "Where is my brother James?" he has not spoken.

James Kent does not return home. Day after day passes, and nothing is heard from him; his mother is in a darkened room, moaning bitterly, and reproaching those who arrested Kitto. Her husband utters no complaint. He does not show himself in the street, but sits alone and stares vacantly into the fire (which has been kindled on the hearth, for the weather is chilly) and seems as if paralyzed by a heavy blow.

Helen Ross ventured into the house. Mrs. Kent refused to see her, but Mr. Kent rose from his chair, when she entered his room, came forward to meet her, took both her hands, and looking full at her pale, sweet face, so full of sympathy, said not one word, but the tears rolled down his cheeks. They did him good, and relieved, for awhile, the weight that seemed crushing him to the grave. Helen sat down by his side, and when he became calm, he asked in a trembling voice, but with a most, earnest, anxious look: "Have you any news from James?" Helen shook her head; then her calmness forsook her, and her tears fell also.

"It is only two days since—" she did not finish the sentence.

"Are you sure you had the right direction?"

Helen showed him the letter received on the very day the storm commenced, and read in that last hour of sunshine, just as the clouds were gathering for this dreary storm, and now, as she looked back, she thought how the sunshine of her life departed as these clouds gathered.

"We must be patient," said Mr. Kent. "He may have been out of the city, and our telegrams not have reached him. He will come in

the next train, and then all will be right again, I hope. We must not despair. We will hope and pray."

His words were broken, and it was evident that he was trying to comfort Helen. She saw how pale, and worn, and wretched he looked, and tried to be cheerful, and checked her tears.

"Oh, yes; I am sure he will come to-day. I think he has been to New York. He will be here—I am sure he will," and the old gentleman looked at her and was comforted, Mr. Kent went with her to the door, at her departure, and she promised him that she would come again soon.

CHAPTER VII.

AT LAST! AT LAST!

JACK CHEEVER was making shoes in the jail, and was actually heard by the keeper, one day, whistling a merry tune. He was very quiet and industrious, and though sure that not even Squire Cushing could save him from the terrible fate that awaited him, he had made up his mind, he said, to live like a man while he did live.

The trial was to take place on the fifteenth of June, Judge W—, from Boston, for the Government, and Jones and Hubbard for Kent and Dick Loud. Almost every one felt a regret that Squire Cushing was not on the prosecution, and that he was merely, on such a trial, to defend poor Jack Cheever, already pronounced guilty by the community. The two law-firms of "Cushing," and "Jones and Hubbard," were never more friendly than now, and I think, from what I have since learned, that their willingness to have the real criminals brought to justice made them less zealous partisans than usual of the maxim: "Every lawyer must regard his own client as the injured man."

There was great interest in the community as the trial approached. In the case of Jack there would be great difficulty in impanelling a jury. There was a wide difference of opinion as to Kitto Kent's guilt; many were slow to believe in the hardihood that could permit the murderer to stand and gaze at his victim in the coffin, to wear the habiliments of mourning, to go about the streets and mingle with others in common talk of the different theories of the murder. Dick Loud excited no sympathy. Indeed, there were many who enjoyed the thought that the timber was cut and dried, and the rope made, that should rid the community of him.

The fourteenth came; but James Kent was still abroad. The mother could hardly be called sane, she was so bitter and reproachful toward every one, scorning sympathy, and refusing the friends who would have ministered to her. Poor Mr. Kent grew thin and pale; his hair whitened, his step tottered, his voice trembled, but he was gentle and patient, and waited for the return of his son.

Helen Ross waited, and Robert March saw, day by day, the sweet patience that did not despair, and the quiet sorrow which was veiled under a calm performance of every-day duty. Helen could not be ignorant that her name was associated with the Kent family—that vulgar

eyes watched her whenever she went out—that busy tongues wondered how she could bear the disgrace which had come to the Kents. But, knowing this, she still went regularly to church, and to her class in the Sunday-school, where her pupils found her loving and kind as ever, but pale and grave.

On the morning of the fourteenth, Robert March breakfasted, as usual, with Mrs. Ross and Helen. The latter said to him as he sat a few moments before going to the office: "Mr. March, we must look to you for all information in regard to the trial. Don't hesitate to tell us whatever takes place. We can bear it better from you than from others."

There was no one else in the room, Mrs. Ross being in the kitchen. Robert saw then how much Helen had suffered. She was pale and thin, and the large eyes had a weary, drooping look. The strong man could hardly repress the longing he had to clasp her in his arms, and beg her to forget all the gloom and horror which surrounded her, and let him protect and shield her. "My poor, wounded dove," he said, within himself; but he had great power of restraint, and well for his peace that he used it. One word of love from his lips *then* would only have added to her trouble.

Squire Cushing was busy in his private room, and had been so since early morning. Robert March was so full of business that he did not go home at the usual dinner-hour. The office was silent for a short time, as most of the town's people dined at one o'clock. Robert, recollecting that Mrs. Ross, usually punctual herself, would wonder at his long delay, had locked his desk, and was taking off his office-coat, when Jones, of the firm of Jones and Hubbard, entered hurriedly, and with some excitement of manner inquired for Squire Cushing. The latter gentleman heard the inquiry, and recognizing the voice, came out.

"I have just come from the jail. Dick Loud committed suicide this morning with a knife which he had concealed in his cell. I have his written confession, corresponding with what I had already gathered from him, and with what he told Father Andrews, who visited him yesterday!"

"He was the murderer, then," said Squire Cushing, with a look of relief, "and young Kent is safe!"

"Not so," said the lawyer; "but we will read, and you can judge for yourself."

Then Jones read what, put in better English than the original, was as follows:

"I, Dick Loud, now make my dying confession. I know so well that I shall be hanged if I come to trial that I prefer to die by my own hand, in private, to making an exhibition of myself on the gallows, and, as no falsehoods will do me any good now, I shall tell the truth, that the guilty only may suffer."

"With my own hand I murdered Judge Webb. I used a club, which I threw, afterward, under the church steps, into a hole which is under the lower step. I used also a sharp clasp-knife. I found the old man asleep, and the moonlight lay in the room and shone full upon the bed and upon his face, which was turned partly toward the wall. I gave him a blow with the club which made him senseless, then I stabbed him three times with my knife, for I thought I had better make sure work of such a job. I raised the left arm once to wound nearer the heart,

then laid the arm back in its place. I was induced to commit this murder by James and Kitto Kent, who offered me five thousand dollars for the job. They wanted to get a will and destroy it. This will was in the iron chest, and I carried it out to James Kent, who stood at the corner of High and Federal streets. I came to Boston on the 10th, in the brig North Star, but did not come to Norbury till two hours before I went to Judge Webb's house. My business was all planned for me in Boston by James Kent. Everything would have gone well enough if that cunning old lawyer had not had the genuine will all sealed and signed in his office. That knocked things up terribly. Kitto Kent was mean and didn't want to pay down. James was scared and feared to stay at home, and I got desperate mad because they didn't pay me as they promised.

"Kit Kent put the board to the chamber window, and I got Jack Cheever to climb the board and look into the window to see if the old man was asleep. Jack never guessed what we were at. He thought it was only a little fun the Kent boys were up to. I went up to his house, and told him I'd give him ten dollars if he'd take a peep into the old man's sleeping-room. 'No stealing, 'pon honor?' he asked. 'I'm not in for anything bad, Dick, that you know.' 'Nothing of the sort, Jack,' I said; 'only a bet with Kit Kent, and you'll oblige me very much. It's all a joke, I assure you, so don't refuse.'

"Jack was not suspicious after that, and he's too chicken-hearted for any such business as murder. So he just pulled his boots off and ran up the board like a cat, and when he came back he said: 'The old fellow sleeps hard and snores loud. Now, what's up, boys? Just let me know the joke.'

"Oh, go along with you," said Kit Kent. "You need not know anything about it."

"I gave him the ten dollars, and he was off without one of his boots, which he couldn't find, for the reason that I had kicked it one side purposely, and I dropped the handkerchief with his name upon it. I am more ashamed now of my treatment of poor Jack than I am for putting the old man out of the way. But James Kent said that it would draw away suspicion for a while from the others, and when we were all out of the country, we could save him by writing and affidavits which we would make. I didn't understand it all, but James Kent has a long head, and I let him do all the planning. Kit Kent went into the house in the evening, and managed to leave the hall-door open for me. I wasn't much afraid of Jack's turning informer, for he isn't that sort of a chap; and, besides, I meant to be out of the way and on the salt water before many days.

"I here, on the word of a dying man, declare that Jack Cheever is innocent as a baby of any knowledge or any share in the murder of Judge Webb. James Kent knew the contents of the will, and determined to get it into his possession, while Kitto Kent stayed near by while I did their bidding.

"If he had not been so mighty mean about paying me, I could have got off to sea and saved myself.

"There is nobody to mourn for me but my mother, and she never loved me overmuch. I intended to have made her comfortable in her old age with my hard-earned money, but it is all over now, and I hope she'll forget that I ever lived.

"This is all a true statement, so help me God!"

Squire Cushing heard this read with less surprise than Robert March. He turned to the latter gentleman and said:

"Robert, do you remember when I was so troubled with the suggestions of the devil! Well, I was possessed with the idea that Mrs. Kent was privy to the murder, and the very thought was so horrible to me that I loathed myself for entertaining it. I suspected, a long time ago, that she knew the contents of the will, and it was this suspicion that led me to propose to the judge to place the genuine document in some

safe depository out of his own house. I was relieved when Dick Loud was arrested, for I felt sure that he was bad enough to murder a man, if he could be well paid for it. But, day by day, the proofs accumulated against Kitto Kent. My most efficient aid in my investigations is little Willie Wood. He has traced the club to the place where it was obtained, and has followed the movements of Dick Loud and Kit Kent, without suspicion, but with singular sagacity. It was through information gained by him that I caused Kent to be arrested. The boy has believed from the first that Jack Cheever was innocent, and his determination to ferret out the guilty ones has led to his interest in the case."

Robert March heard the squire, or rather he sat looking at him as he talked, but all the time he seemed to hear the words—"We would rather hear it from you than from any other one," and he, of all others, to tell her of Dick Loud's confession: "James Kent was the one who planned the murder!" Such was the affirmation of the man who was about to take his own life.

Robert March walked slowly homeward at evening. He would rather have remained away, for he felt himself powerless to soothe the suffering which he feared to meet, but he knew his longer absence would excite their fears, and he resolved to go, hoping that he might not meet Helen at table.

For the first time in his life he wished to avoid her. Chance favored him. She had taken her tea and gone to her room, where she was still busy with her sewing.

The hour was late, and Mrs. Ross was watching anxiously for Robert. When he entered, her quick instinct detected in his manner and expression that he had sad news to communicate, but she controlled her feelings, and busied herself in little attentions to his comfort. But there was evident restraint on both sides. As he rose from the table, Mrs. Ross, with the familiarity which her position permitted, came to Robert, and laid her hand gently upon his arm.

"It must be told, Robert; suspense is as terrible, almost, as sad reality."

"Break it to her gently, Mrs. Ross. I fear it will be more than she can bear."

"Robert," said the old lady, "answer me one question now. Is James Kent implicated with his brother?"

"I fear it will prove so," said Robert, sadly.

"My poor Helen! My poor Helen! Oh, God be merciful to her! Give her strength to bear this great sorrow!"

Robert bowed his head, and with his whole heart responded to this prayer. Then he told her of Dick Loud's death and confession.

When all was told, he said: "Mrs. Ross, I would to God Helen could be spared the knowledge of this. May it not be?"

Mrs. Ross shook her head. "No, Robert, she must know it, sooner or later, and thank God my child is strong to endure, and knows where to look for aid. You know the promise: 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the floods they shall not overflow thee.' Don't stay away, Robert, to-morrow. Come to breakfast as usual. I know you

sympathize in our sorrow, and don't fear that we shall be reluctant to let you know we do suffer. I lean upon you at this time."

"But Mrs. Ross, I am powerless now. If I could bring back the smile to Helen's face, and the brightness to her eyes, God knows my heart, I would do it at any sacrifice to myself."

"Don't forsake us, then! Come to us every day of the trial, and let me, at least, know the proceedings."

Robert promised, and returned to his office, thinking of the heavy blow which was about to fall upon Helen, and he, turning from her, powerless to protect.

I will not give a detail of the trial of Kitto Kent. Our readers can easily understand the train of evidence, and the people of Norbury were astonished at their own want of acuteness in not detecting the criminals sooner, but the circumstantial evidence against Jack Cheever was so strong as to blind them in their search for the guilty.

Kitto Kent was silent and sullen. He had scarcely spoken since his arrest, and manifested but little emotion when told of the confession and death of Dick Loud. He resigned himself stoically to his fate, expressed no wish to see his friends. His mother visited him, but her moans and reproaches annoyed and at last angered him, and he said, bitterly: "Your foolish ambition has ruined your sons." It was too much for the unfortunate woman to bear, and she was carried to her carriage insensible.

The old gentleman came by himself in the evening. Kitto rose up from his low bed as his father entered, and took the trembling hand which was held out to him. "My son," said Mr. Kent, "if I had been a better father you would not be here!"

The stern, hard heart of the young man melted, and he bowed his head upon his father's shoulder and wept.

"Not so, father. If I had been as upright and as free from avarice as yourself, I should not be here. James led me into it, but I might have known better."

The hardest trial to bear was this—"James led me into it." James, the pride of his father's heart! James, the handsome, accomplished young man, whom the father thought so much his superior, and who would, he fondly hoped, honor his name and memory when he himself should lie sleeping in death. No wonder he looked old, and went with bowed head as he passed from the prison to the outer world? He went home, sat down in his arm-chair by the chimney-side, and waited—he was always waiting now. James would come home and prove his innocence; he was not guilty; no, he could not believe it. He sat there alone, with one hand on each arm of his chair, and with his head inclined forward as if he were just ready to rise. Some one did come, for a soft hand was laid gently on his shoulder!

He turned his head a little, and Helen Ross stood looking at him with such love and sorrow as beams from pitying angels in their ministrations here below.

He arose and threw his arms caressingly round her. "My poor girl, you must not come here; forget rather that such as we have ever

lived. Your name must not be coupled with our shame."

She stood erect, looking queenly as she did so, for few women had her fine physical development. "Not so, Mr. Kent; we suffer together—we'll wait together, will we not?" and, as she spoke, she drew a seat toward him and sat down by his side.

"Yes, yes; we'll wait together. There's a train at ten o'clock to-night, is there not?"

"Yes, there's a train to-night," she said, but she sighed heavily. How many nights she had listened for that train, and thought—"he must be there!"

But Helen looked no more now. She had not lost faith in James Kent. Dick Loud's word was worthless, and Kitto was always jealous of his brother, and never loved him. She did not say this to others, but she consoled her own heart thus; but she waited—not to see James in Norbury—but for letters from him. He would write to her, and, some time, when all this terrible trouble had passed away, they would meet and be happy.

Jack Cheever was making a pair of shoes for Willie, and never were shoes made with a more careful hand; the choicest pieces of leather and the strongest thread were selected, and the shoemaker thought, as he worked, of the kind-hearted little fellow who had defended him when all others had forsaken; and he said to himself as he plied his awl—"He'll remember poor Jack when he lies in a dishonored grave," and perhaps he said to himself—"he may come in these very shoes to the place that any one else will shun because they will say it is a murderer's grave."

Jack was ignorant, then, that in another cell, Dick Loud was a corpse, with the written confession by his side, and little dreamed that, while he sat at his work, happier in his leather apron and with his lapstone than he had been for many days, that they were carrying the dead sailor to his long home.

Jack had a fixed idea that, having been at the house of Judge Webb, and, to all appearance, engaged in the horrid deed, no lawyer could clear him, and was trying to reconcile himself to his fate and prepare for death. But, now and then, a gleam of hope for a few minutes would brighten his solitude, and then he would break out in snatches of songs; he tried to recall some psalm-tunes; but, poor fellow, he had not been a regular attendant at the Sunday-school, and his memory retained only two verses, that he used to hear sung when a little boy, and one of these was so lugubrious he thought it made him gloomy when he ventured upon it.

"Hark! from the tomb a doleful sound."

The other was associated with his mother's death-bed, and Jack thought it almost too sacred for such a wicked fellow as himself. But, now and then, he ventured to indulge himself, especially when he thought he was willing to die, and just now the words:

"When I can read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.

CHORUS—And wipe my weeping eyes,
And wipe my weeping eyes!"

were ringing in the cell, and echoed by the old stone walls when Squire Cushing entered:

"Well, Jack—making shoes and singing?"

"I don't feel good enough to sing it often, squire; my mother sung it just before she died," and Jack choked a little, and bent his head over his work.

"I remember your mother, Jack. She had a very sweet face, and was a good wife and mother; but she died young—a great misfortune to her children."

"Please don't talk about her now, squire. Somehow, it seems as if her name mustn't be mentioned in this place."

"Jack, Dick Loud is dead!"

Jack dropped his awl, the lapstone fell to the floor, and a look of blank hopelessness came over his face.

Ah! how true it is: "Despair is never quite despair." Jack had, in his secret heart, indulged the hope that Dick would tell the truth, and perhaps the jury would believe him; but Dick dead—then there was no more chance for him, and the gallows loomed up before him in all its horrible reality!

He couldn't speak; he made no sign; his arms hung by his side, and his eyes were fixed upon the squire. "I have his confession here," said the squire, "and, for once, I believe the rascal has spoken the truth, for it agrees with your own statement, excepting that he says he kicked the boot out of the way purposely, that you might not find it; and dropped the handkerchief because it had your name upon it. I think you need have no more fear, Jack; your trial will be a mere form, and you will be honorably acquitted."

Two great tears rolled slowly down his cheeks, as the squire spoke.

"I can't help it, squire," he said. "I don't know what it means," and he wiped the tears away with the sleeve of his jacket. "Are folks so glad sometimes that they cry about it?"

By this time the lawyer felt a choking sensation in his own throat, and he rose to hide his emotion.

"Don't go—please don't go yet," pleaded Jack. "I ought to thank you, squire, but I can't find the words. I'm a poor scholar, you know."

"You needn't try, Jack," and the squire turned and shook hands with him, as he stood there in his green jacket and leather apron, and thought within himself: "This poor fellow that has just escaped the gallows is more worthy to live than many who are in kings' houses and wear soft raiment."

"Please, sir, I should like to see the parson," said Jack.

"Right, and he'd like to see you."

The court-room was crowded, and, as the trial progressed, the public indignation against Kitto Kent increased daily. The saddest sight of all, was when poor Mrs. Loud came in, clad in deep mourning, and testified that Kitto came in at ten o'clock in the evening and bade his uncle "good-night." After he left the chamber, for the judge had retired, Kent removed the key from the inside to the outside of the hall-door, and locked the door on the outside. She rose from her bed, and, finding the door locked, sup-

posed that Kitto had gone to bed in the chamber just the other side of the hall.

The judge's charge to the jury was one of the most solemn ever delivered in that house, and few listened without tears. Kitto Kent was one of the few.

The jury was absent from the court-room but two hours. Every one knew the verdict which must be rendered, and yet every ear was strained to catch the answer as the judge asked the question of the foreman; and when the word "Guilty!" was pronounced, in a clear, decided, but not loud tone, not a person but heard distinctly, even in the lobby, where the crowd hardly breathed, so intense was the stillness; but when the foreman had spoken, there was a slight movement in the audience, like a wave of wind sweeping over the tall grass of the prairie. The judge feared some demonstration, and waited a moment in stern silence to repress it. It was not necessary. Respect for the white-haired father, who sat beside the prisoner, restrained even the rudest boy in that court-room from any outward manifestation, and the crowd passed out in silence and order.

Jack, of course, was called as a matter of form, the *nolle pros.* was entered on the docket and he walked from the court a free and not dishonored man—everybody rejoicing at his deliverance.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PEACE ON EARTH, AND GOOD WILL TO MEN."

POOR old Mr. Kent and his son parted in the court-room on the day of the trial, and the old man went to his desolate home to wait in his arm-chair by the fire. It was warm weather but he wanted a fire built every evening—they thought he was lonely without it. He never left the house except to see Kitto. People didn't blame Kitto much for saying that he would rather his mother would not come, for she was so full of lamentation and reproaches that he was tenfold more miserable afterward.

My mother persuaded Helen Ross to spend a few weeks with her on a little farm that my father owned about twenty miles from Norbury. I think Miss Helen was pleased to be with my mother. They read and walked and rode together, and we had no company but Robert March and Mrs. Ross. Robert came in a nice little open carriage purposely to bring Mrs. Ross, twice while we were on the farm. When we returned to town early in September, the last act of the tragedy was over, and Kitto Kent had paid the penalty of his crime.

Mrs. Kent was ill with fever, and for some weeks the doctor thought she would not live, but a strong constitution carried her through, and she rose from that sick bed the mere shadow of her former self. She was, till the close of her life, a querulous, fretful invalid. Day after day, month after month, and year after year, for five weary years, Mr. Kent sat in that arm-chair by the fire, waiting—waiting—always waiting. He sat with his head bowed and his hands on the arms of the chair in those hours of the day when the Boston train arrived—at other times he read the Bible and his newspaper. His mind was shattered and his health

broken, but the white-headed, childless old man was very patient, and would often say:

"I have never been successful in life, but I struggled hard. None know but those who have struggled and failed, how hard it is."

The attendant went in to his room one day just as the whistle had sounded for the evening train. The old gentleman sat as usual in his arm-chair, listening; as the door opened he tried to rise, but fell back; the servant sprang to his side, the weary head dropped; one short struggle, and the spirit was freed from the wan, feeble body.

Five years! They were years of shadow to other hearts than that of the poor old waiting father. To Robert March the seasons were so full of dumb, still pain that Norbury became to him no longer home, and after two years of suffering—of hoping against hope, he resolved to leave it forever. His desire to be near Helen, his tender affection for her mother, who loved him as a son—his hopes of promotion through a proffered partnership with Squire Cushing, all impelled him to stay; but, in his soul lay a shadow which nothing but absence might banish, if, indeed, it ever would go away. His sainted mother had said he would and must crush out the love he bore Helen, but what a sacrifice it called for. Yet he must do it or perish. The sense of his loss of her he idolized was becoming daily heavier to bear. To leave Norbury, to plunge into the vortex of life elsewhere, to form new associations, to arouse his ambition for professional distinction—in these lay his only hope for peace of mind, and he resolved to take the steps ere it became too late.

The opportunity for a quiet escape came during the summer of the second year succeeding the tragedy. Squire Cushing having assumed the management of a heavy land-case which required his presence, or that of a trusted and efficient agent, at Chicago, deputed to Robert the responsible task, and thither the young lawyer repaired. Before the close of the year he was involved in the whirl of the busy life which rendered the then rising metropolis of the West one of the noisiest and busiest of places. The spirit of the people, the incentive to exertion, the success which had attended his labors, and the consequent position he had won at the bar, all conspired to confirm his decision not to return to Norbury; and, the land case being closed up favorably, he wrote to Squire Cushing of his resolve to tarry in Chicago permanently.

"Please so inform, Mrs. Ross," he added, "that she may not be expecting and arranging for my return."

"Just as I feared!" ejaculated the old counselor. "Bad case. He's a man of nerve, but he can't face the loss of a woman. What a scoundrel that James Kent was, and—what a fool is Helen yet to cling to his memory! I have to believe there is something wrong in her heart if this old tenderness continues, for it is not possible for a truly pure woman to love such impurity and baseness." He paused, and remained long wrapt in thought.

"I see it, I believe," he at length said, half audibly. "Helen does not know how unworthy James Kent is of her devotion, and Robert

March has been too honorable to make the revelation to her. If she does know how base he is, and still reposes upon his base, bad love—all I have to say is, that she is totally unworthy of Robert's love, that is certain. This is not quite the business of a lawyer, but it is my business as a friend to a noble, true man, to undeceive Helen or prove her unworthy of such regard as we all bear for her, let alone the love of Robert." And he closed his office, walked thoughtfully homeward, entered his library, and, taking down a printed report of the Webb murder trial, began to add to it notes and suggestions, as if to further elucidate some of its points.

He was preparing for a trial of James Kent, in which Helen Ross should act as judge and jury—a cruel trial, but one which he had, nevertheless, resolved should take place.

Calling that evening upon Mrs. Ross, he found both herself and Helen at home, seated before the cheerful blaze of the wood fire which, every winter, glowed upon the cottage hearth. Helen never looked more beautiful. Her two years of suffering had given her old sweet repose something of a severe air; but her native sweetness of disposition seemed also to have deepened by her sorrow, and her sad smile was of that diffusive, illuminating nature which seemed to come from the soul, deeper, and purer, and more abiding than the heart-smile, as it was.

"I have word from Robert, to-day, Mrs. Ross," the squire said, as he drew his chair up to the fire, purposely so located that he could look squarely in Helen's face.

"Will he not return soon?" asked the mother. "His absence seems long to me."

"How does it seem to you, Helen?" the legal inquisitor queried.

His eyes were bent full upon her, and a faint blush flashed over her face, but it was gone in an instant. She answered: "He was ever so kind and attentive that we both miss him. When does he return?"

"Never!"

"What do you say, squire?" exclaimed Mrs. Ross, half springing from her seat.

Helen said not a word; but her eyes dilated and her lips suddenly compressed, as if to still a great heart-beat.

"He never will return, he says, having resolved to settle in Chicago."

"Did he send us no word?" asked Mrs. Ross.

"He said, 'Tell Mrs. Ross of this, that she may not expect me and be arranging for my return,'" answered the squire, laying stress upon the "Mrs. Ross."

"I am more sorry than words can express," the matron said, as tears filled her eyes. "I love Robert March—love him like a son, and yet no claim have I on him." Her last words were almost inaudible.

"He was very dear to me," the squire added. "I did not know how much I leaned upon him until he was gone, nor how deep was my regard for him until he wrote to me a permanent farewell. And yet, I do not deny the propriety of the step he has taken. His life, here, was not one of gladness, I think."

He looked somewhat sternly at Helen, but her eyes were riveted upon the fire, and no sign

upon her face betrayed any emotion within her bosom, if emotion was there. The ring upon her finger—that engagement ring, glistened there as if to warn the lawyer not to press her to an expression of feeling. But he would not be warned.

"Helen Ross!"

He spoke the words sharply, and she turned suddenly upon him, startled and expectant.

"You drove him away!"

Her eyes gazed upon vacancy.

"I drove him away?" she said, slowly. "Was it I, to whom he has been so true and kind? Impossible! I have been walking in a great shadow, and his hand has steadied and guided me. I have no friend so close as he. Have I given him pain, and has he had to flee from me?" Pain was written in every lineament of her face; her voice was as if speaking to the air; and tears filled her eyes, streaming down over her cheeks.

The lawyer, visibly affected, rose and paced the floor.

"Say no more, squire," said Mrs. Ross; "leave it for me to draw away the veil which has been before her eyes, only too long." Her woman's intuition knew well what the counselor's coarser instinct, called sagacity, had failed to appreciate—the peculiar condition of Helen's mind, which would have rendered her unconscious to the nature of Robert March's feeling toward her.

"Helen, my dear girl," said the squire, laying his hand gently on her head, "there are degrees of love as there are degrees of human excellence. You have obtained the first degrees, but have not penetrated to the heights which lie beyond, where those alone can dwell who love virtue, goodness, truth. None of these have you worshiped in the idol you have made—not one of them—not one! I have a solemn revelation to make to you, my child. Come to my library to-morrow, if, after your mother talks to you to-night, you care to know the whole truth, and to act from a nobler, purer, more sacred motive than has controlled you in the past. Be just to yourself—be just to others, and all will yet be well."

He took up his hat and was gone. Neither mother nor daughter stirred for some moments. Rising from her chair, and dropping on her knees before her mother, Helen said:

"What does it all mean, mother? I am stunned, frightened, confused. Tell me all."

Mrs. Ross did tell her all—how for years Robert March had loved her—how he had not only forborne to express it, but had actually hid it—how he had contributed to and studied her happiness alone, regardless of his own desires—how he had suppressed from her all knowledge of the baseness of the man she had loved, and shielded her in the hour of her trial, and now, finding her still unmindful of his devotion, he had at length gone away to suffer in loneliness—alone. Not a word did the daughter utter through all the revelation. Heights and depths of feeling opened before her which she had, in her blindness, never suspected; and her heart throbbed with a keener anguish than it had ever known at the thought of such sacrifice for her."

How Helen wrestled with that night's visitants never will be known. She came down early the next morning, as calm as ever, but paler and more sad. Not a word was said of the subject uppermost in both minds all day. When the afternoon came she simply said, "I am going," and passed out to seek the squire in his library. He was there, awaiting. His eyes brightened at her appearance, but the pallor and deep sadness of that impressive face rendered him less hopeful as a man but more professionally resolute to discharge a painful duty fully.

"I am prepared, Squire Cushing, for any revelations you have to make," she said coldly.

"The revelations I have to make are not new to the mass of our townspeople, though new, I fear, to you. I cannot conceive it possible that you are aware of the true character of James Kent. It is so foul and black that to my common-sense view it savors of sympathy with foulness and blackness to affiliate with it. If you have loved only what is pure of the man, read that document and see, with an unbiassed judgment, how little there is of purity in his nature."

He placed in her hands the report of the Webb trial.

"That you may not be burdened with reading all the evidence elicited, I have gone over the report and marked such portions only as you will care to examine, adding such other remarks to each point as will fully elucidate its bearing. I will necessarily be absent for an hour, during which time you will here be alone and undisturbed. When I return I will lay before you certain other points of evidence which I was able to suppress, but which you should know."

Helen was left alone—face to face with a terror which might well appall a woman's heart. Her idol was to be shattered—her dream of love dissipated—her past to be repudiated as wasted and lost, and her future—what of it?

The judge returned to find her wrapt and overshadowed by her great sorrow—

"Calm and cold and still as clay."

"Oh, squire, this is horrible—horrible!" she exclaimed.

"Horrible, indeed, my child; but not so horrible as it would have been had you become his wife. How near you came I know. Here are the letters you wrote to him directed to the Boston post-office; they were never called for. Even before this first one arrived, in which you pledged yourself to become his wife at once, he was a fugitive; under an assumed name he fled to Europe, as I have ascertained, and never more will be known as James Kent. His whole design, I will now say, was to marry you at the last moment in order to get possession of your share of the property—which he would have sold at once and have lived in Europe upon its proceeds, and you, even if he had taken you abroad, would have led a life of misery, for such a man would have made even your person contribute to his baseness, if it were possible."

"I do not care to hear more, now," she said, rising. "I am crushed to the very earth by this sad hour's testimony. That I can not at once root out from my heart all the tender memories there is human nature's weakness;

but I fully see the chasm upon whose brink I have been standing, and that I have escaped destruction is, to me, a cause for thanks too deep for words. I thank you, squire, for your kindness in this matter, and here, in your presence, I destroy the visible sign which binds me to the past."

She arose, and slipping the ring from her finger, placed it upon the gleaming coals in the grate.

"I thus destroy the signal of my bond to an unworthy man; but, alas! that I cannot consume with it, the memories linked with it."

Helen returned to her home like one walking from a horrible dream. It was months—many months ere perfect peace of mind came to her. During the summer Mrs. Ross's health visibly failed, and as the fall season approached it was evident that her end was not far off. Helen's anxiety became intense. A longing for a strong arm to lean upon grew stronger as the invalid grew weaker. Never had Robert March's name been mentioned by mother or daughter, save by incidental references to something in the past; but, now that Mrs. Ross beheld the coming great change, her desire to see him once more impelled her to speak:

"Helen, dear, do you think Robert would return if he knew that death was so near to me?"

"Oh, mother, don't speak of death! What can I do if you leave me?"

"But, my child, will not Robert come?"

"Yes, mother; but how can I summon him?—I from whom he fled, and whom he doubtless has learned ere this to despise?"

"Never that, I am sure. He is not one to suffer and grow weak and spiteful by suffering. If my child could but realize the power of that man's nature, both for love and forgiveness, she would not shrink from him."

"I realize it, mother, but too fully. It is that which makes me shrink—I am unworthy of such a nature. I think, mother, I love him before all beings on the earth—a love that is better expressed by reverence or adoration; and yet I would never dare to betray it."

"Could you be his wife, Helen?"

"I am not worthy, mother, of that relation. I could be, and would be; but, alas, it never may be." She bowed her head upon the bedside and wept.

The door into the hall stood wide open. A soft step on the stairs Mrs. Ross had heard, but not to heed it. She closed her eyes to utter a mother's prayer over her child's sorrows, and opened them at the touch of a cool hand on her forehead, to behold Robert March bending over her, on the side of the bed opposite Helen.

"Robert—dear Robert!" cried the mother, and, in the rapture of her surprise and delight, her arms were thrown around his neck, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her forehead.

Helen sprung to her feet, trembling in every limb. Then she fell forward on the bed, with extended hands, unconscious, in a brief swoon.

"Take her, Robert; she is yours now, my son—yours—yours," the happy mother murmured.

The young man gazed a moment upon the prostrate form as one stupefied. The outstretched hands were toward him—the engage-

ment hand almost touching him. His quick glance was arrested—the ring was gone! Lifting the hand, he pressed it to his lips, and tears filled his eyes, for the seal of his three years' sorrow was broken. Leaning over the bed, he drew the form to his bosom. Bathing her temples with the camphor from the stand, consciousness quickly returned.

Clasped in his arms! Reposing on his bosom! Her peace was made.

Ten years have passed since the year of the tragedy, yet how little changed is Norbury! It has the same old houses, old trees, old roads, and old sea. But, there is change there, nevertheless. Squire Cushing's law-sign is gone, and in its stead is that of "ROBERT MARCH, ATTORNEY AT LAW," and in the old cottage of Mrs. Ross are the patter of little feet, the clatter of pure, merry voices—three dear, beautiful children, who call Helen Ross "mamma," and whose sweet faces glow like sunlight when Robert March's hand is upon the gate.

And what of our own household, which I, the story-teller, have so long forgotten? There is change there, too. We are all there—all save Willie, who is in New York, in active business-life, giving fine promise of usefulness and earthly prosperity. Lottie Cheever is still with us; but how changed. The same sweet creature; but grown so tall and beautiful! She is the pride of our house—the beloved of our hearts. I am plain in my beauty beside her, yet not a pang of jealousy ever troubles me—she is worthy to be beautiful.

And so Willie thought; for, one day, there came a letter, brief and characteristic, which she at once showed to me. It ran:

LOTTIE:—I am coming in a few weeks to consummate the hopes of years, by claiming you for my wife. I have never spoken of love to you, for what need was there to speak? Will you not write me, and say 'come?'
Yours, as ever.

"WILLIE."

"The cool assurance of this!" I exclaimed. "What right has he to *claim* you? Just let me answer that *business* note!"

"Answer it," said Lottie, "and say 'come!' and I'll sign it—'Yours, forever, Lottie Cheever,'" and she leaned her head on my shoulder to hide the happiness which filled her being.

Jack Cheever had become Captain John Cheever. Squire Cushing, my father, and Robert March had, two years before, purchased a fine ship, giving Jack a one-quarter interest in the craft, and her command, in virtue of his good qualities as a man and seaman. She was named the *Content*, and was manned by some of the best of Norbury boys, whose parents and friends were proud that they should sail under Captain Jack's command. On that happy day she was in from her first voyage to the East; and that Jack should have spent the entire profits of his share in the venture was quite natural. Lottie's first intimation of the arrival was the delivery, that evening, at the door, of a box marked:

LOTTIE CHEEVER,
REWARD OF MERIT.

It was a surprise. Whence had it come?

From Willie, probably—just like him, we all thought. So father assisted in breaking the stout cover, to find within a tin case, securely sealed. The tinner was thereupon summoned, when, lo! there burst upon our gaze one mass of treasures from the Orient. Lottie was astounded as father lifted out silks, a crape shawl, a camel's-hair shawl, a magnificent *escritoire*, inlaid with mother of pearl and precious woods, an elegantly carved set of ivory chessmen, and box after box of *bijouterie* which a lady's toilet and boudoir demand. It was evident that Jack's craft was in port.

Quite evident, for, in the middle of our excitement, stepped the man whom, next to Willie, Lottie loved best of all in the world—her brother. And he was worthy of it, for Jack Cheever was A MAN.

THE END.

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